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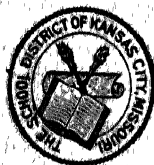
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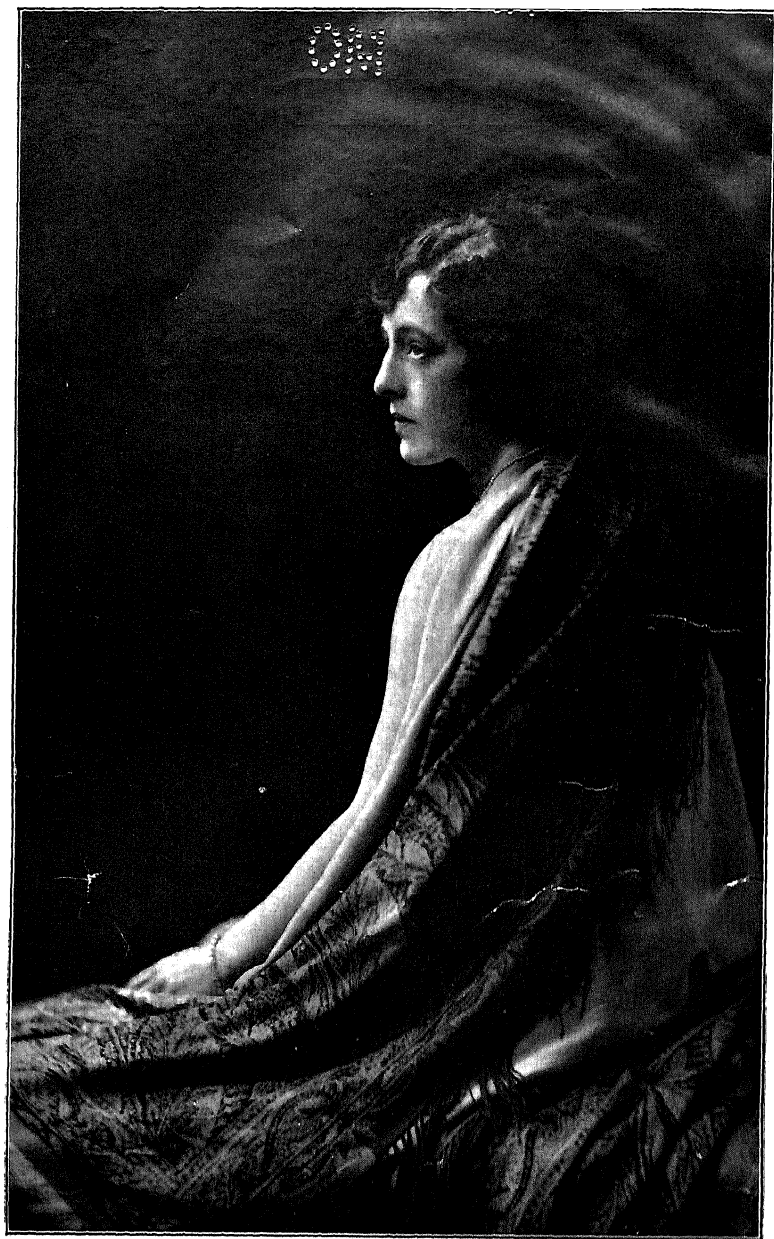
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UNKNOWN TRIBES, UNCHARTED SEAS



PORTRAIT OF THE AUTHOR.

[Frontispiece.]

WITH 52 ILLUSTRATIONS

Made and Printed in Great Britain by
Hazell, Watson & Viney, Ltd., London and Aylesbury.

PREFACE

As I write I am sitting under the shade of a breadfruit-tree, surrounded by flowering hibiscus, the waves of the Caribbean almost lapping my feet, for the experiences related in this my book have given me a *wanderlust* which will not be denied and increases rather than diminishes.

Surrounded by this tropical glory, and reading through these pages, I realise fully how colourless are many of my descriptions.

My friends have often asked me whether I would have undertaken the journey so light-heartedly if I had known as I now do the dangers and privations which had to be faced. Weighing the intense thirst and burning heat, the fever and mosquitoes, the not being able to take off clothing for days on end, even the shortage of food, I can truthfully answer "Yes." For I was not the same being—sex had disappeared.

It is strange what a metamorphosis takes place when deep within the virginal wilds—one seems to fit in with the surroundings. I have talked with many women since my return, and one of the first questions they have asked me has been: "What did you live on?" And my answer was: "Anything—at any time I could get it."

One's entire outlook changes—one becomes part of the primeval jungle—there is no money, no domestic worry, no thought of dress, no softening influence—the thin veneer of civilisation disappears, and one reverts to the primitive.

I have seen a wild pig killed, its throat cut to bleed it, skinned and cooked, and within an hour or two have eaten it with more zest than I would the most carefully prepared dish at home.

In Jamaica whenever we caught a turtle I invariably pleaded for its life, but a little later it only stood for fresh food.

I have once or twice felt revolted at descriptions of acts of desperate men following a shipwreck. But now I understand. The horizon of my vision is broadened and an indefinable something impels me to continue. Some gamble at the tables, others on the race-course, but the greatest of all gambles is with life.

I am no author, and my only idea was to keep a personal diary for future reference. It was only when Mr. Milsted, whom I met in Panama almost immediately after my return from visiting the Chucunaque, urged me to write of my experiences, that I consented after much persuasion to endeavour to amplify what at the best were but rough notes made under most trying conditions. .

I have just written " Finis " to the result, and send it out into the world with much diffidence.

I would like to express my grateful thanks to Sir Sidney Harmer (Director of the British Museum), Sir Arthur Keith (Conservator of the Royal College of Surgeons Museum), Professor Eliot Smith (University of London), Mr. T. A. Joyce (British Museum), Mr. Henry Balfour (Curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford), Mr. Louis C. G. Clarke (Curator of the Museum of Ethnology, Cambridge), Mr. A. R. Hinks (Hon. Secretary of the Royal Geographical Society), Mr. E. N. Fallaize (Hon. Secretary, Royal Anthropological Society), Mr. F. D. Holcombe (Hon. Secretary, British Sea Anglers' Society), Mr. G. Gill, of Panama, and Mr. Gordon Selfridge.

It is largely owing to the help and encouragement

they have given me that the fascination of this work has gripped me.

The sea to-day holds much that is undreamt of, and the world miles of virgin country waiting exploration. It is the dearest wish of my heart to devote the rest of my life to other "Voyages to the Unknown."

It is possible that some reader of this book may be able to advance a theory relative to the mystery which surrounds the primitive Indian tribes in Central and South America. All points of view will be gladly welcomed.

M. RICHMOND BROWN.

WHITE ROCK,
BROCKENHURST,
HANTS.

ADDENDUM

SINCE this book was written Mr. Mitchell Hedges and I have presented to the Nation the collection, numbering thousands of objects, which we brought back from the Chucunaque. Specimens may be seen in the Ethnological Section of the British Museum ; and others have been distributed to Oxford and Cambridge, as well as to museums throughout the country.

Sir Frederic Kenyon (Director and Principal Librarian of the British Museum) describes the collection as unique, and with his permission I publish the letter written on behalf of the Trustees :

[COPY]

BRITISH MUSEUM, LONDON, W.C.I.

June 17th, 1924.

DEAR LADY RICHMOND BROWN,

The Trustees on Saturday instructed me to express to you and to Mr. Mitchell Hedges their most cordial thanks for the very valuable and interesting gift of ethnological specimens from Central America which you have made to them. They were particularly impressed by the very remarkable series of textiles, ivory and bone necklaces, and other objects from the Chucunaque tribe, and highly appreciate your public spirit in offering this unique collection to the British Museum.

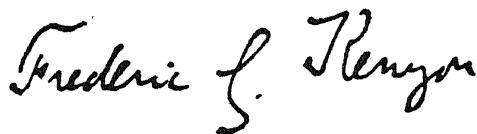
They were also much interested to hear of your proposed explorations in British Honduras, and would be prepared to use their good offices on your behalf, if

there were any need. They welcome the prospect afforded by your energy and enterprise of a notable extension of our knowledge of the early civilisation of Central America, in which they have shown their interest by the exhibition of Maya sculptures now on view in the Museum.

Believe me,

Yours very sincerely,

(Signed)

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Frederic G. Kenyon". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned centrally below the typed name.

Director and Principal Librarian.

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BOOK I

CHAPTER I

THE SHUTTLE OF FATE

OF all the colloquialisms which I fear now form a part, and in some cases the greater part, of our ordinary conversation, the one that always appeals to me is the expression of the feeling of being "fed up."

This absolutely indicated my physical and mental state in the summer of 1921, when, having passed the convalescent stage after a very serious operation, I found myself condemned by my medical attendant to months of inactivity, combined with the endless though kindly exhortations of my companions to "be careful."

My whole soul revolted at the idea. The suggestion that I should merely become an onlooker while my friends indulged in lawn tennis and other games that I had fixed up in my grounds was intolerable, and worst of all, I was to be forbidden to use my most priceless possession—an open-air swimming bath.

It simply could not be done. Everything under such conditions would be abhorrent to me, and I declined to visualise myself becoming a disagreeable, disgruntled and chronic invalid.

Flight was my only salvation.

This, however, was not to be accomplished without great difficulties; but with much determination on my own part, and against the advice of doctors and friends, all of whom said I was positively asking for trouble, it was managed at last.

It is necessary that I should in the first place state

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what prompted my actions, but it was ultimately Fate—or call it what you will—that led me. Had anyone told me a year or two previously I should experience such adventures I should have laughed, although I had previously travelled extensively.

In writing this book I endeavour to confine myself to what I consider interesting or exciting, as it actually appealed to me. I found there is so much that is unknown and undreamt of by the majority of people who seldom leave their own country that it left me wondering how much has still to be discovered in the world, and whether we have even crossed the threshold in our knowledge of ancient civilisation and primitive peoples. Has there been a previous genesis to that recorded in the Bible? Is the legendary Atlantis really a myth? I wonder.

Suffice it to say that I deemed myself highly fortunate at this most serious time of my life to have re-met, quite accidentally on the platform of Waterloo Station, an old friend, Mr. Mitchell Hedges, to whom I shall in future pages refer as "Midge."

He was preparing an expedition for deep-sea research work in the Caribbean Sea and in the Pacific off the Central American coast.

I had at various times heard vague rumours of mysterious spots he had visited, and now and then messages or letters had turned up from all sorts of curious places—sometimes even conveyed to me personally by the strangest-looking people.

At this accidental meeting, travelling together by the same train, we had a long conversation. Then and there I made up my mind and suggested I should join in the work. He laughed at me, treating it as a joke.

"I know you've travelled," he said, "but it's largely been by routes where no discomfort has to be borne. Have you any idea of the hardships a voyage like this may entail?"

Sitting comfortably in a first-class carriage, I admit it was hard to imagine them.

"Can you give me any idea of them?" I said. "You've been in all sorts of holes and corners of the world."

When he had drawn a horrible picture of fever, ticks, mosquitoes, hunger, thirst, and a whole category of other dreadful things, I could not help but ask what chances there were of our ever coming back.

"I really don't know," he said, "and no more does anyone else when he sets out on an expedition like this, but if you're really determined on going, the greatest essential is pluck"; and then cheered me up by adding:

"Anyway, life is very futile, so nothing matters much, but you'd better put all your affairs in order and make your will before you leave."

This rather damped my ardour momentarily, but throwing everything to the four winds of heaven, and really not caring greatly what happened, I determined, against all advice, to embark on this wild gamble.

I was fortunate in being able to render some material but necessary assistance to the project, and after many difficulties left my house at Brockenhurst and joined Midge (who was surrounded by a frightening amount of paraphernalia, guns, ammunition, and strange-looking fishing tackle) on board the s.s. *Bayano* at Avonmouth Docks.

I was rather late, and my greeting from him was curious—he shook hands and laconically said:

"Here you are. I thought you'd funk'd it at the last minute."

I was a little surprised. But more surprising things happened later, and now nothing surprises me.

From that time onwards I gloried in the full freedom of life, leaving behind all banalities and the so-called advantages of ordinary civilised society, caring for nothing but open spaces and the exhilaration of true enjoyment of nature at its best, or the thrill of battling

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against it at its worst, both of which time and again have been my lot where there was no law but that of self-preservation.

There was little of interest on the voyage from Avonmouth to Jamaica, except when nearing Turk's Island, where we entered the hurricane zone, and passed through the tail of one of these dreaded visitations which do such damage periodically in those latitudes.

Soon after this, on our way down the Windward Passage, we steamed close to the island of Haiti, where the heat was intense, and shortly came in sight of Cape Maysi, the eastern extremity of Cuba.

I began to feel quite excited, as I realised we were entering the mystical Caribbean, and I could almost picture myself living in the days of Drake and Sir Henry Morgan—the days of the buccaneers. Is there any other part of the world that has the traditions of the Spanish Main?

We arrived in Kingston, Jamaica, in the middle of a thunderstorm, which seemed to centre over the Blue Mountains, and which rather spoilt our view of the harbour. Having got over our farewells, which are never pleasant, we went through the Customs without any bother, and motored direct to the Myrtle Bank Hotel—a fine building on much the same lines as one finds in Europe.

When I remarked to Midge, as I might have done in England, what a dreadfully wet day it was, he laughed and said :

“ It does this regularly every day at the same time. This is nothing to what you will see ; when a river comes up and the land disappears before your eyes, then it's really raining.”

The heat was intense. The sun had suddenly burst out and was shining brilliantly when quite unexpectedly and without the slightest warning there came an awful flash of vivid lightning, coupled with a most dreadful

explosion. The whole hotel seemed to tremble. The shrieks of the coloured maids rang through the corridor and sent me flying to the main hall where everyone was wondering what had happened.

It appeared that from almost a clear sky an electrical fire ball had fallen in the road just outside, but nobody seemed much perturbed and in a few minutes the excitement was over.

Done up with the heat, I idled away a couple of hours watching the fish playing in a perfect mill-pond of a sea. I was struck by the stillness, which could almost be felt—it seemed as if there was more thunder in the air, but nothing broke the silence—not even a dinner gong—till about 10.30 p.m., when every cock in the neighbourhood began to crow, to be answered by barking dogs on all sides. All the stray dogs in the world must have migrated to Kingston. The mosquitoes were a worry, but covered up carefully under a mosquito curtain I passed quite a good night.

The corridors in the hotel are all uncarpeted, so I was awakened early by footsteps and gazed out on a perfect day, and after breakfast, which in the tropics consists almost entirely of fruit, went into the town. I was not much impressed with it, but everything was new to me and full of interest. The native women carry everything on their heads, balancing heavy loads perfectly.

I watched with much amusement a family "flitting." The woman carried a square wooden table on her head, with the four legs stuck upwards, in the centre of which the family goods and chattels were piled. A dozen children followed her, carrying bundles of various sizes, the rear being brought up by two tiny tots hugging plantains, bananas, and sugar-cane, which latter, their chief food, the whole family were chewing as they went along. The husband was also attached to this train, but, as usual, he was doing nothing—he seemed to be reserving all his energy for the issuing of orders.

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One of the things that first strikes strangers is the tired, lazy way the natives have of going about.

Another fact that struck me was how quickly the wind gets up and as quickly disappears. To-day at 1.30 p.m. it blew hard, and the sea was very rough, yet an hour later it had entirely dropped and the sea was like glass. I learned later that this happens day after day at precisely the same hour.

The morning after our arrival Midge went out fishing in Kingston Harbour but drew a blank. He was quite philosophical about it, and said it was what he expected; so we made up our minds to waste no more time here.

"We'll hire a motor and go on to St. Thomas-in-the-East," he said; "I may get some big fish there. Off an old pier in Bowden Harbour I've seen jew fish that weighed hundreds of pounds, and only a few miles from there is a place called Holland where there are thumping big alligators, so we'd better take our rifles."

The scenery during the drive there was wonderful, the variety and profusion of the foliage and flowers quite dazzling. The road to start with was reasonably good, and after leaving Kingston some miles behind us, skirting the foot of the Blue Mountains, I first saw gigantic tropical cactus growing wild. Many of them were quite 30 feet in height, and in some places so densely did they grow that they actually formed a solid wall. The steep hill-sides were dotted with aloes, some just flowering, while towering high above were the peaks of this truly beautiful range.

Deep gullies in the mountains showed that at times volumes of water poured down, cataracting over a boulder-strewn bed cut out by the torrent, the force of which must be very great, for although the rivers were now almost dry as we jolted over, yet the huge tree trunks and masses of rock that had been brought down were proof that when the floods were in full spate they were powerful enough to carry almost anything

before them. We crossed two of these. The first river was appropriately enough called Dry River, the second The Yallahs, after which we commenced to rise slowly, and continued to do so for a considerable distance. Careful driving was necessary, for at some of the hair-pin bends a bad skid or any recklessness would have meant a sheer fall of some hundreds of feet down a precipice into the Caribbean. I held my breath several times.

After some miles of exquisite scenery we dropped down once more almost to the sea level, where the road ran between a palm grove, the tall, stately coco-nut trees meeting overhead, whilst peeping in between the green I could see on our right the ocean rollers thundering on the sandy beach. At the beginning of this coco-nut grove we stopped for a little to take a picture of a water-fall at the foot of which were several native women washing, their clothes rolled up round the hips in much the same fashion as the Breton fisher-women. They used no soap, but seemed to pound the clothes with stones while washing, afterwards bleaching them in the blazing sun.

Further on, the road became very bad, so that we were almost jolted out of the car, and to add to the discomfort we were treated to the usual daily downpour of rain.

Just before arriving at Bowden I saw my first alligator, but we left it in peace as it was only quite a small one. It was lying partially out of the reeking black mud on a rotting log of wood in one of the several mangrove swamps we passed. The stench from the decaying vegetation was so pungent here that it necessitated the smoking of several cigarettes, and for quite a little time afterwards one seemed to be able actually to taste the penetrating fetid odour.

We reached Bowden at about two in the afternoon and were met by one of the managers of the United Fruit Company, who did all in his power to make us comfort-

able, placing their "Great House" at our disposal. To reach this we had a climb of about a thousand feet in a buggy drawn by two sturdy mules, and on arrival were grateful for the homely cup of tea. I felt rather knocked about after the journey, so went to bed early, but spent a miserable night owing to the mosquitoes and the rats.

The house was lighted by electricity, but as only one plant supplied the town it was impossible to light any one house without the docks. All lights were extinguished at 9.15 p.m., about ten minutes' warning being given. After that darkness.

Waking in the middle of the night, I was surprised to see my room lit with dancing lights. I rubbed my eyes, wondering if I were dreaming, but discovered on closer inspection a number of fire beetles had entered and were circling and flitting backwards and forwards. The fireflies I had seen in the south of France were in no way comparable in size or brilliancy to those that were so numerous here.

Next morning breakfast was served at 5.30, and consisted of boiled eggs, grape-fruit and tea, which latter had a flavour I hope I shall never taste again. The reason for this I discovered was that the people had omitted to replace the covering of the storage tank from which the water was drawn, so several bull-frogs and lizards had found there a watery grave.

I was feeling rather miserable with mosquito bites and was advised to try ammonia in my bath. This in England was only associated in my mind with the kitchen, but I can recommend it as being most soothing.

Feeling very much refreshed, I went for a walk with Midge. The birds, butterflies, and flowers were a source of endless pleasure, and I came back laden with wild blooms which, though beautiful to look at, were quite without scent.

The housekeeper where we were living was looking

after a little orphan native baby, and this tiny tot was my shadow and was always on the look-out for my return. As she rushed to meet me now I took her photograph. I should never have believed that I could become so much attached to a black baby, but I simply couldn't help fondling it.

Midge was anxious to start fishing, but was much disappointed at not being able to get any bait, so after another walk we rested for the remainder of the afternoon, then to bed, where the rats gave me another disturbed night.

The fishing at Bowden proved so disappointing that we went on to Holland, determining to have a try there, and also to hunt alligators. The road was again bad, but the scenery was beyond description and quite made up for any discomfort.

CHAPTER II

JAMAICA : QUEEN OF THE ANTILLES—I AM INTRODUCED TO SWAMPS, ALLIGATORS, AND A BIG FISH

ON arriving we found ourselves in one of the largest coco-nut plantations on the island. The Backra's (manager's) house is almost in the centre, and we were most cordially received. Not far off were large swamps intersected by the Plantain Garden River, which flows into the sea here. Adjoining the morass was a lake narrowing at one end into what is almost a river. The sides are fringed with dense masses of wild ginger, and it looked, as it actually was, an ideal home for alligators. Two natives met us in their dug-outs, which were in such a state of dilapidation that it was only by sitting in the stern of one and keeping the bow out of the water that we were able to prevent it from submerging, as there was a hole in it big enough to put one's hand through: There were several other cracks and crevices, water pouring in continually, necessitating constant bailing to keep afloat.

The natives themselves made a remarkable picture. Their clothing consisted chiefly of rags, and very few of them. One of them had got a few mullet, small silvery fish excellent for bait.

We had our rifles with us, Midge also carrying his tarpon rod.

In the narrow part of the lake, which is not more than 30 feet in width, we tied close in to the side among

the wild ginger. It seemed impossible that big fish could live here, especially tarpon, as the place was entirely land-locked.

We had not been fishing very long before we saw, about 70 yards away, a dark patch moving along the surface, just like a log of wood.

"Big alligator," whispered Midge, "try and get a sight on it."

"Yes, and when I fire down goes the boat," I retorted, for I felt sure the least shock would result in our undoing.

"Perhaps you're right," he answered; "we'll have a go at them presently from land."

"Look! the line's moving!" I suddenly said.

He was immediately all attention and ready to strike, but before he could do so, without warning the water seemed to open and a mighty fish burst feet into the air, shaking its head vigorously, flashing in the sunlight like molten silver.

"Gone!" said Midge, "and I never even had a chance to hit into it—tarpon are the devil!"

Although we spent some time trying further, not a bite did we get, so we landed and stealthily crept along the shore to get a shot at the alligator.

Peering through the undergrowth which fringed the shore, I touched Midge on the shoulder and silently pointed to where the hideous head and snout of a saurian was clear of the water 50 yards away. I knelt down, took a good sight, and fired.

We plainly heard the smack of the bullet as it found its mark. There was at once a violent convulsion in the water, the brute disappeared, and then the head and front paws appeared again, after which it slowly sank—this time for ever, for the water here was so deep that my anticipations of a suit-case made from the skin of the first alligator I killed vanished into thin air.

"Bad luck!" said Midge, to whom I had confided my hopes some days before, "but you'll get plenty

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before we've finished our wanderings. I know a place where you can't walk twenty yards without seeing swarms of them."

I said nothing, but couldn't help thinking in my own mind that the charms of such a place must be an acquired taste, and wondered if I was really thirsting to go there!

Our luck that day was out—not another chance did we get of a shot, but what I had seen buoyed me up with expectation for the next day.

The following morning we started early. At the opposite end to where we had struck the big tarpon the day before, the lake broadens out considerably and is only separated from the sea by beach and sand bank extending for a distance of about 100 yards, and before going after the alligators again we wandered along the shore, where I found much to interest me in many of the strange odds and ends which had been washed up by the breakers. Thousands of old coco-nuts were strewn just above the water line, while numbers of small crabs were running across the sands at incredible speed, darting down into holes which were evidently their habitat.

I found several very beautiful shells, and pounced on one trophy, which showed in the perfection of its construction that nature can rival the finest works of man. I had never seen anything quite like it before and my companion told me it was a sea fan. Later we were able to get several more of them, and a little farther on we came to a tiny settlement of natives. They knew Midge, who had been there before, and promised to help us to collect some. They were very friendly and sang us some of their quaint songs. One old woman became very confidential and informed me that she had had twelve children, each by a different man, which seemed to be a source of great pride to her, looking on it, I suppose, as a tribute to her powers of fascination.



I KNELT DOWN, TOOK A SIGHT, AND FIRED (p. 13).



EXAMINING STRANGE LIFE AMONG MANGROVES (p. 24).

After this we returned to the swamps, but I must sadly relate that my hopes of that alligator suit-case did not materialise, for although we fired and hit several of the creatures, not one were we able to get.

I think we might have been successful towards evening, but we had to run for our lives, for a blue-black mass advanced rapidly from the sea towards the land, and it was evident we were in for one of the worst sort of tropical storm. We had almost reached the manager's house when it burst and we were at once engulfed in an avalanche of rain. As we entered the door there was a blinding flash of lightning, while a frightful crash of thunder seemed to shake the building. There was nothing to do but wait till it was over, but even the storm had its compensations, for the manager's wife kindly regaled us with tea and hot cakes.

When the storm had passed we started on our return to Bowden. In several places the road seemed to be almost washed away, our car once having to go through water up to the hub of the wheels for a distance of about 150 yards, but the brilliant afternoon sun shining through the foliage made a beautiful picture, seeming to jewel everything with iridescent drops.

Shortly before reaching Bowden the road became perfectly dry, and on arriving we found they had had no rain there at all.

We spent the night here and returned to Kingston, but the fishing again proving poor we left for Port Antonio, about 60 miles away. In every streamlet and pool, clean or otherwise, native women were engaged with washing, for which they seem to have a passion, rubbing away from morning till night. Those we met walking carried everything on their heads, from enormous bundles to tiny tin cans.

We arrived at Port Antonio late in the afternoon. I was by this time in a terrible condition with mosquito bites, having been eaten alive by them in the Holland

swamps. My arms and legs were so inflamed that I had to have a doctor. The irritation was appalling, sleep impossible. My face had not escaped the attacks of these pestilential creatures, and I must have presented a funny sight, one eye being completely closed up.

In spite of the state I was in, we went on a fishing expedition next day and set shark lines at two different places on the coast, one called Blue Hole and the other Williamsfield, leaving them out all night in the hope that we might catch a big fish. Unfortunately there was such a rain storm that I didn't go with him when Midge examined them the following morning, and was awfully disappointed when he came back and told me that they had landed a fairly large shark. I had so much wanted to be present at the first catch.

We wandered and fished around Port Antonio for a few days, and returned once more to Kingston, but by a different road from that by which we had come.

While I was stopping to pick some gorgeous pink and scarlet hibiscus a man I took to be a Jamaican came up to me and asked for a cigarette, which I gave him. He was carrying a bundle with the utmost care. He proved to be one of the coolies who were imported some time ago to Jamaica to work in the plantations, and was, like most of his race, imbued with the religious enthusiasm which one so often encounters in these natives. Tenderly unwinding layer after layer of silk and cloth he placed in my hands a coolie Bible, which he explained was his only possession in the world, and read several passages from it in a strange sing-song voice. He was on the tramp, and I got rid of him with some difficulty, but he was really only a fanatic and quite harmless.

We passed through Manchioneal by the road which runs along the coast, twisting and winding, sometimes level with the ocean, and sometimes making it possible

to see the great rollers hundreds of feet below bursting in showers of spray on the rocky cliff.

Leaving Manchioneal behind, I looked down from a great height and said to Midge: "Why, surely we have come to Holland again?" for in the valley beneath us lay the swamps where dwelt the alligators.

Leaving this on our left we finally arrived at a little place called Bath. Driving up a terrible road in a curious gully, which seemed to be driven into the side of a spur of the John Crow Mountains, quite unexpectedly we reached a *cul de sac*, where the cutest little hotel nestled. It was on two floors, and a balcony ran the entire length of the second. It is impossible to describe the beauty of the view. The balcony overhung a mountain stream which ran gurgling over huge boulders. On the steep sides down to the cascading water giant tree ferns, banana trees, various palms, and bread-fruit trees were inextricably mixed in a wall of green.

The comforting promise "The Lord will provide" flashed to my mind as for the first time I saw the banana, cocoa, coco-nut, and bread-fruit trees growing next to one another, all in fruit. On the principle that "God helps those who help themselves," I made the most of my opportunity.

Tiny humming birds were flitting in and out and hovering over flowers. They looked more like hawk-moths than birds.

But the chief feature of interest was the fact that about a hundred yards above the hotel (if it can be dignified by such a name) from the mountain-side issued a natural boiling hot stream of water in which it would be possible to cook an egg. Beneath the funny-looking hotel large concrete baths had been built and the hot stream was guided down to them. I was told the baths were visited by many people, as the water was of considerable medicinal value; and I will say

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that after our long dusty ride one of those baths was most refreshing.

On resuming our journey to Kingston we found there had been a big storm in the Blue Mountains, with the result that the Yallahs River, which when we had crossed it before was almost dry, had now come down in a raging flood. So suddenly had this happened that in the centre of the rushing water were two native carts laden with bananas in danger of being washed away, together with the mules. A crowd of natives were up to their waists in the torrent, hauling and pushing, doing their best to extricate themselves and the carts from their sorry plight. Of course it was utterly impossible for us to attempt the passage, and we were obliged to make a wide detour, which made us very late in reaching Kingston.

Midge had become rather disgusted with the fishing and prospects of deep-sea research work in Jamaica, and suggested we should leave for Costa Rica, when after dinner one evening he was persuaded by several well-known residents to try a place called Black River. He dissuaded me from going with him, saying :

" I'm only going to run down for a couple of days to test it, but, personally, I think it'll prove to be a wash-out."

However, when he returned three days later I knew the moment I saw him that something out of the ordinary had occurred. He overwhelmed me in a flood of enthusiasm. He had struck an enormous fish which had towed him for hours, and from enquiries he had made down there it really seemed as though our visit to the island would not after all be in vain. On this trip he had only taken down two light rods, but he now suggested that the whole fishing outfit should be moved and that we should make a base there for an indefinite period.

Black River is exactly a hundred miles from Kingston

and with much difficulty everything was transferred to the little town which stands on the shores of the Caribbean.

On arrival, at the first superficial glance the place did not impress me very much, but we were lucky enough to find a very comfortable house, from the balcony of which we could sit and watch the fish playing on the surface, and could frequently see the dorsal fins of great sharks cutting through the water in chase of their prey.

Midge engaged a native fisherman called Griffiths, who was one of the quaintest creatures I have ever seen and always amused me. Some of his expressions were comical in the extreme, and I used often to go and talk to him for the pleasure of hearing them. His usual greeting to me on a fine day was :

“ The climate is smooth this morning ! ”

He was very superstitious and was guided by his dreams, which meant that all our actions had to be regulated according to their significance. To dream of yellow or tying a hog (a native custom) were the luckiest dreams he could have, but to dream of a mule or a white woman depressed him (and therefore us) for days, as he was certain it was the forerunner of disaster, and any encouraging remark was met with a lugubrious :
“ It's bad lucky, so it is.”

On Sundays he became very religious. He also frequently emphasised the fact that he had been married in church, sanctimoniously adding that there were not many like him in Black River.

He was devoted to me, and made the matter of my bait a special study. On one occasion when he had kept some mud fish for over a week in a small pan, I enquired how he managed to keep them alive. He informed me that he fed them with small pieces of bread. This struck me as being a curious diet for fish, and in the simple English that one was obliged

to use to him, I remarked that he must be a good father, which drew forth the ambiguous reply : " So it is, Mum, so it is ! "

I hope Griffiths and I may meet again one day, for of all the natives I met he stands out in my memory as the most original and amusing.

The day after our arrival at Black River we started fishing at 5.30 a.m. This may sound rather early to English ears, but it is the best part of the day in the tropics. The sunrise on this morning was perfect. From palest blue the sky changed to *eau de Nil*, then to a duck's-egg green, all gradually merging into a red glowing canopy, the water by the reflection appearing like a sea of blood. The sun rose slowly in a blaze of colour. In places the sky was flecked with mole clouds—the sort of effect that artists dream of but never really achieve.

We watched it changing till the sun became silver in a cloudless blue sky, long shafts of light radiating from it.

I have seen the sun rise in many other countries before and since, but this morning stands out in my memory as the most beautiful.

About 7 o'clock the excitement began, for Midge caught a big tarpon—the first I had seen. He was a beautiful fellow as he lay there shimmering in the bottom of the dirty little dug-out. Before he was finally landed I watched with interest his fight and struggles for liberty. It was wonderful to see him leap into the air, shaking his head like a puppy, and then falling back into the water with a loud splash. He went on till exhausted, and I'm afraid that at heart I can't be a real sportsman, for I couldn't help feeling as I looked at him that he was too lovely to die.

Griffiths did everything he could to prevent my touching him, affirming that he knew it was " Rodney's ghost "—Rodney being the name of a man who had

committed suicide shortly before in this very spot—but in spite of Griffiths's gloomy forebodings I gently detached several of his scales before he was returned to the water to swim away—a most amazed fish ! I afterwards had them mounted as menu holders.

It was here that Midge caught his world's record red snapper ; it weighed $102\frac{1}{4}$ pounds.

Unfortunately I was not there at the commencement of the fight, having had to remain at home owing to a mild attack of malaria, but the natives shouting outside the house that the Backra had a big fish on compelled me to get up, run to the river, jump into a dug-out, and follow. I was glad I did so, for I got an excellent series of photographs.

The huge mouth of this fish simply fascinated me—it had teeth like a dog, and we kept the two largest, which measured over two inches in length, in order to have them mounted later.

The sport here exceeded our wildest hopes, and I got quite hardened to the sight of Midge covered in blood, and never even turned a hair when—as was often the case—my overalls were in the same condition.

One morning I had rather a bad scare, the town being shaken by an earthquake. I could not help thinking of the terrible destruction caused in Jamaica under similar circumstances some years previously, when Kingston was absolutely devastated ; but the natives were so panicky I was ashamed to show my feelings, and fortunately it proved to be nothing much. This was the second shock in a week, for the island had had one the previous Saturday.

CHAPTER III

GROTESQUE LIFE BENEATH TROPICAL WATERS—AMUSING NATIVE CUSTOMS

THE little English church at Black River is the quaintest place imaginable, and I am afraid that when attending service I found my sense of humour was more strongly developed than my bump of reverence. Griffiths is one of the shining lights, and was so screamingly funny that I had the greatest difficulty in keeping from laughing out loud. He copied the parson to the minutest detail, and his sonorous "amen" would convulse an archbishop. He also had the great honour of carrying the plate round. His Sunday clothes absolutely transformed him into another person. On weekdays he usually wore a much-patched pair of pants, and a shirt the colour of which had originally been blue, but had faded to a nondescript shade, owing to the sun and many washings, while his hat beggars description. It was made of straw, and the crown was so nearly parting company from the brim that it was a source of constant wonder that they did not separate entirely.

On Sunday, however, the full glory of his appearance rivalled that of Solomon. He was clad in spotless white from head to foot, and sported a pair of coloured glasses with bone rims. These were reserved exclusively for Sundays and were only worn for effect, being absolutely unnecessary so far as his sight was concerned, but a great adjunct to his dignity.

As the choir passed to the vestry at the end of the service I was obliged to make a hurried exit, for my eye

caught sight of the coloured carpet slippers of the leading tenor peeping from beneath his black cassock.

I fear my devotions that day did me little good, and had I not kept reminding myself that I was the only white woman in the building and *noblesse oblige*, I don't believe I should ever have got through the service without disgracing myself.

We fished in the neighbourhood of Black River to within a few days of Christmas, when we both felt a little break would do us good. We, therefore, accepted an invitation to stay with some English friends at Kingston, motoring the whole way.

I never got properly accustomed to the thrills of motor driving in Jamaica. There is no speed limit, and if there is a rule of the road no one bothers about it. The natives all meander in the middle of the street, and it is really wonderful there are not more accidents, as they never attempt to move until the car is practically on top of them.

On this occasion we had a collision with a double buggy. It was coming towards us and occupied most of the road. Neither driver would give way, and it ended in our crashing into the buggy, carrying part of it away. Fortunately the mules were unhurt, and we were only shaken, but the altercation between the drivers rivalled Billingsgate, our man scoring, for his car was undamaged, while the buggy was left stranded. I often wondered what happened, for the occupants were dressed as if they were going either to a funeral or a wedding.

On our return to Black River we made a camp at Five Tree Cove, which—though we caught most of our big fish here—is chiefly associated in my mind with food, for I prepared the coffee and cooked the fish as it was caught, while Midge sat in the dug-out a few hundred yards offshore fishing.

It was an eerie place—a sandy horse-shoe shaped

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beach terminating on one side in a point of land jutting out into the sea. In the centre, a few yards inland, were five tall lone palm trees, while dense mangroves covered the neck of land, even growing some little distance out into the hot shallow water of the Caribbean. The tangled roots stretching into the sea afforded protection for innumerable strange creatures that I have never seen in the more open water. Numbers of small oysters had attached themselves to these roots, and repulsive-looking sea slugs, sea-cucumbers, and sea-centipedes seemed to have made this their home.

I spent hours creeping about watching this marine township, and it was while fishing off here that I first made the acquaintance of that horrible creature, the sting-ray, a species of sea bat, with a long whip-like tail in which there is an awful-looking dagger. Anyone unfortunate enough to be struck by it dies a terrible death in a few minutes, so that it is very dangerous work catching them. We landed several, and had two narrow squeaks of being struck. The largest weighed over 300 pounds.

We also caught another species of ray here. Though repulsive in some ways, their backs are beautifully spotted and quite handsome.

I spent much time adding to my collection of coral and shells. This often necessitated working on various reefs about half a mile offshore for hours at a stretch, clad only in a bathing-suit and rubber-soled shoes, the latter being most necessary, owing to the enormous number of sea eggs which seem to live in colonies on the bottom. Their needle-like spines are highly poisonous, and after penetrating the flesh break off easily, causing awful pain and inflammation. One has to be a real enthusiast for this work! Many days have I returned with my hands all cut and bleeding and my nails worn nearly to the quick, face and neck blistered and burnt black—yet I went out again day after day. I feel now that



CAMP AT FIVE TREE COVE (p. 23).



GRIFFITHS AND AUTHOR AT FIVE TREE COVE (p. 24).

it was worth it all, for some of the specimens which I brought back have proved to be unique.

How little one realises what lives beneath the surface of the ocean! I have often marvelled at the hideous creatures that were brought ashore here; by the utmost stretch of the imagination I could never have believed such brutes existed. Many of them were nauseating in their hideousness, and their appearance did not belie them.

I was badly stung here with what I believe to be a species of stinging sea-weed, my legs and the lower part of my body being covered with a scarlet rash. This was attended with fever, and as the rash disappeared it left behind an intense irritation which lasted for days.

Some little time after this I struck and managed to land a jack weighing over 40 pounds, subsequently bringing to gaff two more about the same size.

The fishing at home had only mildly interested me, but it is difficult to express the tremendous excitement and enthusiasm that grow on one when hunting big game in the sea. One of the chief reasons for this is the thrill of anticipation. I have often been almost afraid to strike when I have had a bite, as it was impossible to know when I first felt the tug whether I was going to smash into a fish weighing pounds or hundredweights.

I always remember going up to a place called the Broad Water, about a mile from the mouth of Black River—one of the most beautiful stretches it has ever been my lot to see.

After tying the dug-out to some lily roots I cast out, and was watching the great tarpon rising and other fish leaping into the air—all amidst surroundings which only the tropics can give. Then came a bite—I struck—the rod was nearly wrenched from my hand. A great shape leaped into the air, hardly seeming to touch the

water before it again sprang, parting the line with such ease that it seemed impossible a fish could have the strength to do it.

It was a tarpon, about $6\frac{1}{2}$ feet long. I caught several of them, but the largest, which put up a really splendid fight, did not weigh more than 75 pounds.

We decided to fish here at the full moon, when night is turned into day, but found the results very disappointing from the point of view of sport. However, the wonderful effect of the moonlight on the river and tropical foliage more than compensated, and here I witnessed one of the most remarkable sights I have ever seen in my life. A heavy rain was falling some distance from us, but the moon was not obscured by the clouds, and this produced exactly the same effect as the sun shining through rain, but instead of the familiar rainbow which one usually associates with a watery sun, this was remarkable in that it was a lunar rainbow of a most glorious silvery colour.

It all seemed quite unreal, and strangely enough, not the least wonderful part of this phenomenon was the fact that it appeared perfectly reflected on the placid surface of the river.

In the tropics every day seems to produce something different, but this beautiful spectacle I never saw again.

Midge now determined to try another method for capturing and examining sea creatures, so had some enormous nets made, and when these were ready we were frightfully excited to see what our first result would be the morning after they had been set.

On examination we found two fine green turtle, the largest weighing about 150 pounds. It took us most of the morning to get them disentangled, and I did feel so sorry for them, especially for the big fellow, who reminded me of a drowning man being saved. After he was freed he started puffing and wheezing in the

most comical way, almost as if he was thanking us. We took them ashore and photographed them.

Midge subsequently caught another enormous turtle in the net off Parattee Point, and on this occasion he and Griffiths played a rotten trick on me. They persuaded me to get on its back, which I did, very gingerly at first, but feeling the brute underneath me making for the sea, as they always do when their heads are turned in that direction, I gave a piercing shriek. Midge and Griffiths were pretending to hold it, but had suddenly let go. My parting with the turtle was certainly not dignified, as I found myself flat on my back. The two wretches were doubled up with laughter, but Midge managed to take a photograph (for private circulation only!).

This turtle was the largest I have ever seen, and it took the combined efforts of seven natives to drag it ashore in the net.

Another day we arrived to discover that a sea-cow had torn the net to ribbons. Unfortunately we did not see it, as it had freed itself before our arrival, but later in the afternoon we saw a male and female with their family feeding on the sea grasses quite close inshore. I was very bucked at this most uncommon sight, and begged to be put ashore in order to get what would have been an absolutely unique photograph, but had no luck.

They were huge brutes—much larger than any land cow.

One of our chief fishing grounds was off Parattee Point, where there are a few fishermen's huts. While Midge was fishing I often went ashore and talked to the women, who live under the most primitive conditions—they are almost animals in their habits, modesty as known to us being quite foreign to them. The children, however, were fascinating, and they got to know me quite well, and watched for my coming with the sweets with which my pockets were always filled.

In order to photograph many of the fish Midge got

here I was often obliged to wade into the sea up to my waist, but there was no fear of getting cold, as at home, for the sun dried one in a few minutes, but I always had a dread of shark and other terrifying forms of life that abound in tropical seas.

We had no servant difficulties at Black River, where our staff consisted of eleven—all black. A compound was attached to the house, where their children, numbering about thirty, were housed.

The native women seemed to show very little affection for their offspring, and I had rather a bother with one female—a very bad-tempered woman—on this question. I caught her flogging a little chap about five years old; his cries were pitiful, and I was so angry that I got rid of her on the spot. It is strange how unkind they are to their children when one takes into consideration how regularly they have them—almost invariably one every year.

The dress of my servants was rather an eye-opener at first, and took some getting used to. At home I always insist on uniform, but such a suggestion would have been out of the question here. Their one concession was caps and aprons, but their print dresses were the most vivid colours possible, preference being invariably given to a wicked shade of pink.

The parlour-maid is known as the "butleress," and has the same standing as a butler would at home.

The gardener had a pet donkey which was a great favourite with us all. I got a picture of him one morning chewing up a dead breadfruit-tree leaf; he seemed to consider these dead leaves a great luxury.

On Sundays the dress parade rivalled Hyde Park, and as our house was on the road to the church I had an excellent view. The women were dressed in all the colours of the rainbow, with enormous bows in their hair, no hats being worn. The effect of their black shoulders shining through the thin materials was really ludicrous.

Shoes are only worn on Sundays, and then have very high heels. One can see by their gait, and also the expression on their faces, what agony they must be enduring. With them it is indeed a case of *il faut souffrir pour être belle*, and the whole aim of their lives seems to be to copy the white tourists who pass through. Stockings also are reserved for Sundays and only reach to the knee, the tops being rolled over very tightly, which keeps them in place in the most extraordinary way without garters. I tried this method of wearing them and found it most successful, and much cooler.

The men and women who walk from the mountains and outlying villages to church, often as far as 12 miles, carry their boots and a tin can of water slung over their shoulders on a stick. On reaching the church door they perform a regular toilet, bathing their feet and putting on their boots very carefully. After service these are at once removed and carried home. It is another of their customs I have often felt I should like to imitate.

The men are also very smart on Sundays. They are dressed in grey and navy blue lounge suits of quite an English cut, except that the coats are extremely short, and their ties jump to the eye at once. They are very vivid, and spots are greatly favoured. The creases in their trousers would do credit to any valet. Their boots are immaculate—rather French in cut—long, with narrow toes. How they ever managed to squeeze their feet into them was a mystery, for it must be remembered that the whole of the week they are barefooted. Their linen is always spotless, and much in evidence, while a Homburg hat and a smart cane complete the effect.

Another of my amusements was to watch the native women when they were having a difference of opinion. At first I could not understand why the argument always terminated by one of the ladies—or both—seizing her skirt in the left hand, and giving it an upward flick

before retiring from the contest. I later learnt that this was the greatest insult that could be offered.

The market is held twice a week and presents many interesting characteristics. The women sit about on the ground surrounded by their wares, much as the natives do in Egypt. They chiefly sell vegetables, a peculiar kind of liquid sugar which they make themselves, and tobacco which is rolled in coils like rope, and is, I think, purchased by the foot. It has a most pungent smell, as I can testify, for Midge tried some of it, but though he is an inveterate pipe-smoker it was too much even for him, and the smell hung round the house for days.

CHAPTER IV

WE LEAVE JAMAICA AND ARRIVE IN PANAMA—THE INCEPTION OF MY VOYAGE TO THE UNKNOWN

WE stayed at Black River for six months, and had made up our minds to leave the Island when Midge got a telegram begging him to go to Kingston where a most terrible tragedy had taken place. A shark had come into Kingston harbour in quite shallow water, and bitten the leg off a girl of fifteen who was bathing. They were very anxious that Midge should try and catch the brute, so this decided us to leave at once, and I had a desperate time packing up the collection, which had assumed enormous proportions.

I was quite touched by the affection the natives showed when they heard that I was leaving them, and they crowded round begging me to return.

When we reached Kingston we found the whole place seething with excitement, and we had actually to fight our way through the waiting crowd at the station.

Midge got busy at once on his shark lines, and after they had been run out on the Saturday afternoon, he left Griffiths, who had come up with us, with instructions to send a message at once if he saw any signs of a movement.

Next morning a breathless messenger arrived saying that something was happening, as one of the buoys was rocking violently, and asking us to go down at once to the harbour.

We were all frightfully excited, and dashed off on the

red-hot instant, running most of the way till we came to the fringe of the crowd, when we had a free fight to get through the dense mass of people, which had assumed alarming proportions near the spot.

The force of the crowd was such that I was carried with it right into the water before the police were able to come to my assistance.

The natives by this time were almost out of hand, shouting and roaring at the top of their voices, and it was found necessary to reinforce the police considerably.

The shark was caught all right, and events happened so quickly that the next thing I realised was that I was actually photographing the brute.

I was lucky enough to get some good photographs under most trying conditions, for every time I moved the crowd surged round me. The press photographer was unable to fight his way through, so I was glad to be able to provide the press with all the published pictures of the tragedy, and home did not seem so far away when, a few weeks later, I happened to see the *Daily Mail* with an account of the tragedy and one of the very photographs I had taken.

The crowd on shore had all the while been steadily augmenting until it numbered thousands, and in spite of every effort of the police it was impossible for us to force a passage and reach the road. There was a little wooden jetty running out close alongside where the shark had been dragged ashore, and now this commenced to creak ominously under the weight of the mass of swarming humanity that had crowded on to it. Part suddenly gave way, and a number of people were thrown into the water. Now the police boat arrived, and Midge with much difficulty managed to get into it, the constabulary also hauling the carcass of the shark into the boat to be taken to the Water Police Station for an autopsy.

With a whoop the crowd broke up and made full-tilt

down Harbour Street. The pressure relieved, I was able to extricate myself.

The catching of this shark was not an unmixed blessing so far as I was concerned. During the few days we had to spend in Kingston before leaving the Island, the way the natives would point at and discuss me whenever I walked through the town was a source of embarrassment.

Strangely enough, we left Jamaica by the same boat, the *Bayano*, as that on which we had come out, and in her went on to Costa Rica. I was very sorry to leave the island which held so many happy memories.

I found that Port Limon was very different from Kingston. A large crowd had assembled on the United Fruit Company's jetty, dressed in every colour of the rainbow, many of the women wearing the most magnificent large tortoiseshell combs, which I rather envied.

The feathered scavengers of the town, the vultures, were so tame that they reminded me of the pigeons of the Tuileries. The way they fought and engaged in a tug-of-war over the disgusting pieces of refuse was most amusing.

We did not stop here to fish or visit to any extent places in the vicinity, but a turtle pound at the mouth of a little river close to Limon interested me greatly.

On leaving here Midge said: "To-morrow morning you'll see the greatest engineering feat in the world."

I retired to my state-room that night all eagerness, and on waking dressed hurriedly, and went on deck to find we were opposite the entrance of what looked like an endless wall of huge concrete blocks. I have never seen so vast a harbour—it was beyond me to imagine that it could ever have been constructed by man.

As the ship passed through the entrance on the left lay Colon, and the first thing to catch my eye was a long white building, which I was told was the Washington Hotel. As we slowly crept up to the dock we

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steered close to half a dozen big merchant ships waiting their turn to pass through the Panama Canal. It did not take us long to get alongside, and I was agreeably surprised to find how quickly we got through the Customs, there seeming to be no restrictions or exasperating delays such as one experiences in Europe.

The docks themselves filled me with astonishment. Somehow I had always had a sort of idea in my mind that Panama was quite a primitive place, but this was quickly dispelled. Instead of landing, as vaguely anticipated, in a country where I should have to put up with what I could get, I found myself surrounded on all sides with evidences of the most advanced civilisation, the first to greet me being the luxuriously appointed six-cylinder Buick car in which I drove to the hotel.

As we passed through the streets, the shops were a fresh revelation to me, as were the prices when I later went to make purchases. The names above them indicated that the majority were owned by Indians and Chinese.

After luncheon—as is usual with my sex—I made a bee-line for the town, and was surprised to find many Paris novelties in the shops, and advanced styles of dress, but in these I was not much interested, such things as top boots and breeches occupying my thoughts for the moment.

That night there was a ball at the hotel. Midge advised me to wear my smartest frock, and his advice proved good, but I am sure I shall have the sympathy of my feminine readers when I say that half-way through the dance I discovered that most of the back of my frock had parted company, being made of taffeta silk, which I did not realise perished so quickly in the tropics. I felt rather desperate about it, as my programme was full, but when my next partner arrived on the scene I explained my predicament, rushed upstairs while still

respectable and changed into something else. The floor was excellent, as was the band. The majority of my partners were United States officers, looking very smart in their white uniforms, and their dancing bore out the character sailors have all over the world. Altogether it was a very jolly affair.

Colon, I quickly discovered, was a strenuous place to live in. The day started with a swim in the wonderful open-air pool, which is filled direct from the sea and fitted with the latest diving-boards, hand-swings, and a water-chute. It is one of the chief attractions of the Washington Hotel, and the Rialto of Colon's smart set; but—tell it not in Gath—it can hardly be described as the home of Mrs. Grundy! This is usually followed by a round of the shops, a look in at the Club for cocktails and a glimpse at the latest English and American papers—then lunch, after which a short siesta, generally succeeded by a "bridge tea" lasting so late that it was invariably a rush to dress for dinner, then a dance either at the hotel or Club—and more bridge till the small hours.

This may not sound so very strenuous, but it must be remembered that a temperature averaging well over 80 degrees leaves one rather a limp rag.

I seized every opportunity of visiting all that was to be seen in the district, spending one long day up the Chagres River, where the scenery was exquisite, and another at the Gatun Spillway, where although I didn't fish myself, I witnessed some fine sport, saw several tarpon, snook, and other fish landed, and again made a remarkable excursion on Gatun Lake. This great sheet of water presents a sad sight. In the construction of the Panama Canal vast areas of land were flooded by the damming of the Chagres River which covered all the lower jungle, leaving the larger trees standing out, and these in course of time dying now present the spectacle of a dead forest. In the moonlight it is more

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than eerie, but Nature, unthwarted, shows a profusion of orchids growing on many of the leafless trees.

In the meantime Midge was busy with preparations for a short exploratory trip down the coast with a man to whom he had been given an introduction, and who gave such extraordinary reports of a race of Indians that he was most anxious to verify them. He chartered a small yacht owned by this man and proceeded to fill it with such a mass of supplies—medicine, guns, ammunition, fishing tackle—as to make me wonder where they were going to put themselves. While he was away I took the opportunity of going over to Panama City, travelling by the Panama railroad, finding everywhere the all-prevailing luxury, the observation car being built of solid mahogany with revolving chairs, enabling one to admire the scenery from every point of view, while the running throughout was extremely smooth.

On arriving at my destination I went to the Tivoli Hotel.

Panama City is much larger than Colon, being really a city of two Governments—i.e. the United States and the Panamanian—the outcome of which gives rise to a rather peculiar situation. The United States section is dry, while the Panamanian is wet. There is a white line drawn across the road which divides the two sections, so if you are on United States territory and want a drink it is only necessary to cross this line to obtain as much as you want at practically any time. For example, the Century Club is wet, while only a few yards away the Tivoli Hotel is dry !

It has often been stated that the fact of a country being dry results in people drinking more than they would otherwise do, and from my own observations I can testify to the truth of this.

In Panama City it was quite easy to go about and see everything : there are literally crowds of the most up-to-date motor cars available at the extremely low

rate of 15 cents (American currency) to any part of the town, and the roads are very good, being tarmac, smooth, and free from bumps.

In Ancon and Balboa, the American section of which adjoins the city, the houses, which are built in bungalow style, are most picturesque, many of them being covered in both mauve and red bougainvillæa, and with bushes of hibiscus and flowering cactus this all gives a brilliant effect. The stately royal palms, which are dotted everywhere, make one realise more than anything else that this is indeed the tropics.

A very short distance out from Panama City lies old Panama, but all that the great English pirate, Sir Henry Morgan, left of it are the arch and walls of the church and a collection of rubble.

I spent some weeks on the Pacific side of the Isthmus while Midge was away and did not find time hang heavy on my hands. One day I had an inexplicable feeling that he had returned from his expedition, so taking the train went back to Colon, to find that he had registered two minutes before I walked into the Washington Hotel. I was all excitement to know what had happened, so that evening after dinner we sat together and went into the matter fully.

He told me that he had been to a place called the San Blas, which constituted a number of sandy, palm-covered islands inside coral reef barriers amidst the most glorious scenery. His description fairly made my mouth water. The inhabitants were a race of Indians, from whom the island archipelago takes its name—most primitive, and retaining all the ancient customs of their forefathers, including a belief in wooden deities.

He drew such a picture of this extraordinary race that I thought he must be exaggerating. Sitting as we were in a luxurious hotel it seemed impossible the world could contain such a people. He went on to tell me the women wore rings in their noses, and added: "I

believe I'm on the verge of a big discovery. I've had certain information given me about a tribe that undoubtedly for centuries has never seen a white man, situated where no human being has ever yet penetrated, except possibly the old Spanish Conquistadores, and they were unable really to enter the Indian domain owing to the savagery of the people."

"It's impossible," I said sceptically.

"Well," he replied, "I am only telling you what I have heard, and I have conceived a scheme by which it might be possible for us to achieve an almost forlorn hope; but I don't disguise from you that in the ordinary course of events it would be out of the question. I am told they rigidly guard the territory in which they live, and that they are actually pre the stone and iron age. Their weapons are most primitive—why, it appears they even use wooden bows and arrows, the points of which are steeped in a virulent poison."

I must admit the whole story sounded like a fairy tale. After talking it over for some time he finally clinched the argument by saying: "I'm going. I don't know how I'm going to get there, but I'm going."

Fired by his enthusiasm, like the impulsive person I am, I felt impelled to say: "So am I!"

CHAPTER V

FATE PLAYS INTO OUR HANDS—I LEAVE FOR THE UNKNOWN

WE must have spent hours arguing this question, and in the small hours of the morning had arrived at no decision.

At breakfast next day we started again.

"You know," he began, "I've been worrying how to get there, and for the life of me I can't think. It's quite impossible without a boat, and even then it's a terrific gamble. The waters are uncharted and abound in coral reefs. It will mean groping one's way and almost playing blind-man's buff. How long it'll take I've no idea, nor how one can get back—neither have I any conception of what one's likely to encounter, but there's bound to be great difficulty. I've come to this definite conclusion—there's no human being in this world can get to that spot unless he has got a boat, and it would have to be one with an engine, because I've seen sufficient of the narrow passages in the coral reefs to realise that it would be out of the question to tack with sails only, especially as the prevailing winds are the north-east trades, and as you know, always blow from one quarter, never varying."

We were still sitting discussing the question when word was brought to us that Major Fitzwilliam, the man with whom Midge had been on the exploratory trip, had called. He joined us and plunged into further accounts of the San Blas, and told me several very interesting things about many of the little native villages along the

coast before one reaches there. Suddenly he turned to Midge.

"Do you want to buy my yacht, cheap?" he asked. "I've got to go back at once to the United States and can't take the *Cara* with me, and I know of no one down here likely to want her. Make me a bid—you can have her at practically your own price."

"Come and see us at twelve o'clock to-morrow," Midge replied, "and we'll give you an answer."

After he had gone we looked at each other.

"'Pon my word," he ejaculated, "it almost seems as if fate were playing into our hands—it's the very boat for the purpose."

"How big is she?" I asked.

"Twenty tons—perfectly appointed, engine-driven, and can do ten knots—ample accommodation for stores and petrol, but there's one big drawback—she has no sails, and if anything went wrong with the engine may the Lord help one, for if that broke down, or one ran on one of the reefs in that part of the world, I think there'd be an excellent chance of playing Robinson Crusoe for the rest of one's life, for I don't see how one could ever be found. It would be fish, coco-nuts, and bananas for ever and ever, amen. It's out of the question for you to go; the risk is too great. If anything happened to you all your people in England would look on me as a madman for having taken you."

This rather nettled me.

"I suppose I can choose for myself?" I retorted, his opposition making me more determined than ever. "If the price of that boat is anything like reasonable we'll buy it, and I intend going."

His only reply to this was: "On your own head be it; I wash my hands of all responsibility—you must do as you like."

He thereupon went down and had another look at the *Cara*, working everything out as carefully as he could.

and on his return he made up his mind she would fulfil all requirements, so when Major Fitzwilliam arrived next day, financial arrangements were quickly concluded and the yacht was ours.

I shall now tell how we were enabled to reach this amazing race and to become friendly with them. Many people, and the Press practically all over the world, have wondered how it was accomplished, and time and again I have been asked how we ever got there and why they were so friendly.

The very night that we had purchased the *Cara Midge* elaborated the whole scheme.

"You remember," he started off, "that Fitzwilliam and I took a whole lot of medicine down to the San Blas. We found them in a pretty bad state of disease; we treated them for itch, and almost every other wretched ailment you could think of. One thing struck me—when I administered a very strong dose of Epsom's salts when they came to us with what they called 'Sabadee' (i.e. hot belly), they marvelled so at its effects that they considered it a miracle. Also in using strong ammonia, on my letting them smell the bottle, the strength made them gasp and their eyes water, which seemed to stagger them, and they used a term for this medicine which has given me a big idea. They called it the 'Medicine of the gods.' I penetrated the Mosquitia some years ago and noticed the primitive Indians in that part of the world had the same idea.

"By that curious means of transmitting news, which I have never been able to understand, I was told just before we left that this unknown race had heard of our so-called supernatural healing of diseases. My idea therefore is that we encourage the belief that we are sent by the great gods to cure them. We must apparently be gifted with esoteric powers. To attempt anything by force would certainly lead to disaster. A gun would be the very last thing to use, for I believe the

Indians inland are surrounded by almost impenetrable jungle, and you could be struck with one of their poisoned arrows and never see or hear where it came from. You wouldn't stand the slightest chance of escape if they were hostile.

"Another thing—you remember those great ropes of imitation pearls and enormous glass diamonds you brought out here for carnivals and fancy dress balls—we'll take those with us too; it will all add to the spectacular effect, but heaven knows what the result will be." Then in a half-hearted way he added reflectively: "I've been thinking seriously over the matter again, and it's really absurd for you to think of going on this trip. Give up the idea. I don't believe any woman could physically see it through—it'll want tremendous endurance."

"I've made up my mind to go," I said with decision, "and if you go alone I'll never forgive you."

"Oh Lord!" he groaned, acknowledging defeat, "I wish I'd sneaked off and never said a thing about it!"

He reckoned it would take at least a week to get everything in order. Having made up our minds, I am sure neither of us had the slightest thought of retracting—but we are indeed creatures of circumstance, and though all our plans were made, it was a curious thing how that so often little-considered thing called fate ordained otherwise, for the next day I was greatly bothered with a pain in my side, and on its growing rapidly worse was compelled to undergo an examination at the Colon Hospital.

My hopes sank to zero when the head of this Government establishment (Dr. Leary), assured me that it was urgent for me to come in as a patient without delay.

"I'm afraid it will mean another operation," he said.

It seemed too heart-breaking for words that I should have to contemplate another terrible ordeal after all I had been through. Our plans were certainly dashed

to the ground, but there was nothing for it—facts had to be faced, and so I entered the hospital for an indefinite period.

I experienced the greatest kindness and attention from the doctors—everything that science and human power could do was done for me, and after I had been there for a few days, my relief when told that an operation would not be necessary can be imagined. I had, however, to resign myself inevitably to spending at least three weeks on my back before they could hold out a prospect of my being able to leave.

Midge came to see me every day, and on hearing the news I persuaded him to go on with his preparations for the trip.

“When I come out, a sea voyage will be just the thing for me,” I told him; “you go ahead and get everything ready, and come and report progress every day.”

After this it quite bucked me up to hear of the stores being put on board, and then the petrol. The day came when he was able to tell me that he had seen the President and Ministers, and that they had written letters to various Government officials asking them to give us every assistance so far as lay in their power.

He also told me that the Santo Tomas Hospital had supplied a big medicine chest, with pounds of sulphur ointment and goodness knows what else. At last the time arrived when he said that everything was complete, and that we could start as soon as the doctors would permit me.

It was nearly a month before I was able to leave the hospital, and the night I did we had a dinner to celebrate the event, to which Dr. Leary and his wife were amongst those invited. They were rather startled when I told them I was going on this expedition. Dr. Leary at first looked very grave, and then said:

“Well, I’m not sure it wouldn’t be the wisest thing

for you. I really believe that such a trip would do you more good than stopping in an hotel."

"I'm so glad to hear you say that, doctor," I said, "as I'm quite determined to go."

"When are you off?" he asked.

"To-morrow," I replied.

"Absolutely out of the question!" he cried.

After much argument we compromised matters and I agreed to remain another day, and it really seemed too good to be true when the little yacht, with flags flying, proudly chugged off from the dock out into the harbour.

Our entire crew consisted of Robbie, the original owner's coloured engineer, whom we had taken over with the yacht, and an old native of the name of John George, who had been on a little schooner up and down the coast, and could act as pilot.

As we passed down the harbour several of our friends waved their handkerchiefs, we answering them with our siren, and the signalling station at the Washington Hotel flagged us "Good luck."

When we encountered the main sea after emerging from the harbour entrance, I felt I had indeed embarked on a great adventure.

Suddenly an enormous barrel lashed to the back of the boat caught my eye.

"What on earth is that?" I asked.

"Extra drinking-water," Midge replied. "We may not need it, but I'm not taking any chances, and it's one of the greatest essentials."

The calm inside the harbour very much belied what was outside. The wind was blowing hard and blew still harder, and the sea from being choppy commenced to turn rough. I began to feel uncomfortable, and as we continued on our way the weather became rapidly worse. The north-east trades were blowing half a gale. Presently we started to ship water over the bow—

our little boat appeared to be almost standing on end as it dipped down from the crested waves, and for the first time in my life, probably owing to having been on my back in the hospital for so long, I was violently sea-sick. It was not a passing spasm. I grew steadily worse.

"We're between the devil and the deep sea," groaned Midge. "It would take me as long to return as to reach the harbour of Porto Bello. I'll put in there, but am afraid you've another hour or two of misery in front of you before we can arrive."

All those who have suffered from sea-sickness will, I'm sure, sympathise with me, for I was absolutely prostrate. I couldn't help remembering what the Captain of the boat that I went out to Colombo in once told me. The majority of the people on that occasion had been very sea-sick and I was talking to him about it. "Yes," he said, "the first day they think they'll die, the second they know it, and the third they're afraid they won't!"

I felt exactly like them just then.

Without warning the violent motion of the boat suddenly ceased and we seemed to be just gliding. Midge came along and managed to raise me to a sitting position.

"You're all right now," he said, "we're passing into Porto Bello harbour."

It was a merciful relief, and I recovered in an astonishingly short time and went on deck.

The scene was wonderful—great hills rising on every side, covered with masses of green, while nestling at the water's edge right off our bow I could see a little collection of buildings.

"Is this Porto Bello?" I enquired.

"Yes," he replied, "we are now entering one of the most historic places in the world. Wait till you get ashore and I think you'll be surprised. After you have

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had something to eat we'll go, for we certainly cannot leave here before to-morrow."

I was quite astonished at the amount I was able to eat and felt quite myself again afterwards.

From the deck the old forts were the most striking sight. I had heard many tales of the exploits of Morgan and Drake, and these forts had a real interest for me. How they were ever able to take such a strong, naturally fortified position as this I could not conceive, until it was explained to me that they landed a little way down the coast, and by almost superhuman efforts dragged their old muzzle-loaders to the top of a hill and bombarded the town from there.

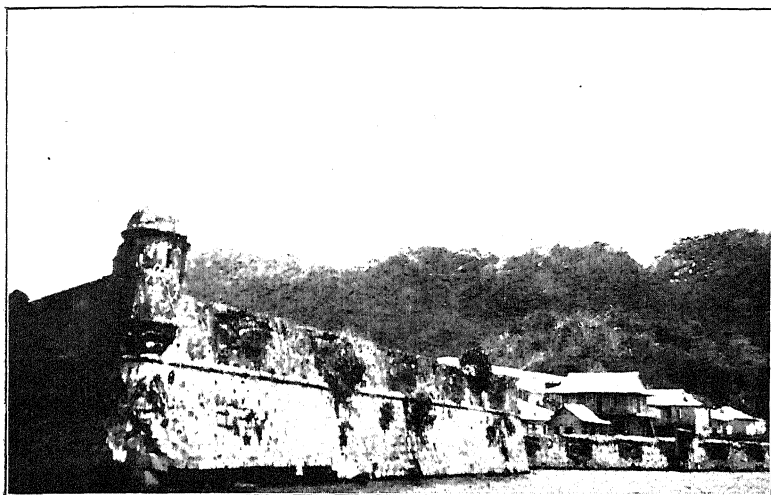
We were rowed ashore by Robbie and spent the afternoon wandering about.

Very few people go to Porto Bello, owing to its lack of communication with the outer world. The strange old place is a sad sight and is now given up to ruin and decay. There is no industry ; life seems to consist of eating and drinking. The small population is, of course, coloured, and the majority of the children go about quite naked. Many of them were in a frightful state with hook-worm, their poor little stomachs tremendously swollen, their navels sometimes protruding over an inch. Like the rest of the people they seemed to me without life ; sitting about listlessly, so unlike the happy, bright kiddies we know at home.

Looking at the place more closely, I was next amazed by the wonderful old battlements and the equally remarkable ruins of the once beautiful city. The ancient guns were rusting and mouldering just where they lay when they were dismounted.

The natives were very much interested in us. I don't believe they had ever seen a white woman like me, as I was dressed in breeches and boots, and wherever I went and whatever I did their eyes followed me.

We wandered about the ruins and explored the



OLD FORTS OF PORTO BELLO (p. 46).



NATIVE SPEARING FISH, ISLA GRANDI (p. 51).

dungeons and the old church with its crumbling interior, and lastly the cemetery. Human bones lay everywhere; apart from those on the ground there were large rusty old tins filled with them. I understand the people pay a fee for burial and after a year, unless they keep on paying, the coffin is dug up and flung anywhere, with the skeleton in it, and in course of time the wood breaks open and the bones fall out, while in their vacant place someone else is buried. Such an appalling state of affairs made me feel quite sick.

Another curious point about Porto Bello is the number of bridges built over little streams and gullies. Passing over one of them we came across an army of crabs, their bodies a wonderful blue, their legs crimson with white points.

Adjoining and almost surrounding the cemetery was a horrible mangrove swamp, the mud and decaying vegetation giving off an indescribable odour as it festered in the blazing sun.

Towards dusk we went out fishing in the dinghy, but although we trolled and fished several places we were not rewarded by a single bite.

Just after dark there appeared to be a little more life on shore. Someone started to make native music on a pipe or whistle, which only had two notes, accompanied by a tom-tom. I found that after about half an hour the deadly monotony of the noise, which at first had irritated me, came to have quite a soothing effect. A little later sudden activity seemed to come on the people, for they evidently started a dance, accompanied by most unearthly yells which continued for hours.

We were anchored close to the shore, and in the faint light of the moon the tumble-down huts and houses appeared quite beautiful. The shadows they cast in the mill-pond sea reminded me of Venice. There was nothing to do but sit and dream, and listening to

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the insistent drone of the insects and the eerie strains of the tom-tom and whistle, I felt very happy—it was all so peaceful.

Shortly after the revels had ceased huge black clouds rose above the mountains, with vivid lightning. I was very tired, so turned in and dropped to sleep almost at once.

CHAPTER VI

A TERRIBLE JOURNEY—WE ARRIVE AT NOMBRE DE DIOS
—THE SAN BLAS—A VISTA OF LOVELINESS

IT seemed as if I had hardly closed my eyes before a frightful crash roused me. I sat up and found we were in the middle of a wicked storm. The lightning was terrifying. Looking towards the town every building and tree stood out plainly silhouetted in a blue blaze. It was a wonderful sight, the electric fluid seeming to flicker round our boat. It must have lasted for a couple of hours, during which time sleep was out of the question. At daybreak I found the effects had been serious, for the dynamo on the boat had been fused or deranged, and even the engine's magneto upset, so that we were more than two hours repairing the damage, and our lighting apparatus was so badly affected that we were unable to use it for the rest of the trip.

When we finally did get away, we found it was still very rough outside. Just at the entrance to Porto Bello harbour there are three islands called the Sister Cays, and as soon as we had passed these the sea was terrible ; we could scarcely make any headway at all.

The spectacle was magnificent, great rollers bursting in sheets of spray high into the air on the rocky coast, while in the background the towering hills covered with dense forests made a memorable picture.

We struggled along manfully, perilously close, or so it appeared to me, to the most fearsome-looking rocks. Old John George informed us that a little farther on

was a very bad channel which it would be madness for us to attempt to navigate in such weather.

We were right opposite a passage between a beautiful palm-clad island and an ugly-looking reef, so, swinging hard to starboard, we shot into this haven of refuge. Once through, we found ourselves in a most glorious calm lagoon amid wonderful surroundings.

Gliding round the back of the island we dropped anchor. There was no wind there at all and not a ripple on the water. We were close to a sandy beach with palm trees growing to the edge—an ideal place for a bathe—or so I fondly imagined, until old John George rather put me off by telling me it was infested by sharks, and Midge completely squashed any further hopes I might have had by pointing out that I should probably be stung by stinging sea weed, sea-centipedes, or some other loathsome thing, so I gave up the idea and we rowed across to a tiny village on the other side.

It was the most primitive place I had yet seen, the few huts having bamboo sides and thatched roofs. We collected some beautiful shells and returning to the yacht, spent the rest of the day fishing. We had quite good sport, and even better still from my point of view the fish we caught were very good eating.

I got my bathe after all, for we found a little pool shut off from the sea, with only a tiny outlet, and I could have sat for hours in the really hot water.

It was such a lovely place I should have liked to stop for a couple of weeks, but Midge only laughed, saying that this could not compare with what we should see later.

We were unfortunate in our weather, for that night we had another terrible tropical storm. John George called it a chuquesana. It was accompanied by a sudden and fearful gale of wind ; had we not been prepared, with both anchors out, I don't know what would have happened.



HUTS AT NOMBRE DE DIOS (p. 50).



RAMSHACKLE BRIDGE AT NOMBRE DE DIOS (p. 53).

This war of the elements was followed by a glorious morning, and we made up our minds to risk running through the bad piece of water that we had avoided before.

After snatching a hasty cup of tea and biscuit we started. Zigzagging for about a quarter of an hour through a little narrow passage in the opposite direction to that by which we had come, we cleared the island, and right off our bow stretched a channel of deep water, oily smooth. Farther on the island of Isla Grandi rose abruptly on our port, with a few native huts set amidst the coco-nut trees at the base of the steep incline, while to starboard stately mountains towered pile on pile, all clothed in the same impenetrable verdure.

We could see on the mainland more hutments built amidst the trees close to the shore, so cut off from the world that it was obvious there was nothing for the natives to do but fish and catch turtles, and then we encountered the dangerous piece of water about which John George had told us the day before. And it really was terrifying. Huge waves over 20 feet high were breaking through where the channel merges into the open sea. Close on either side of us were awful jagged rocky reefs where the mighty rollers curved and broke with a dull boom. Their strength and force seemed irresistible, the air quivering with their thunder.

My heart was in my mouth. Had the engine failed it was a certainty that one of these great seas would have completely pulverised us on the rocks, and I breathed a sigh of relief when we were clear of this veritable death-trap.

A little later, passing between the mainland and another small island, we plunged again into a swirling vortex of water, and in the valleys between the great waves we could see treacherous rocks showing their murderous fangs.

After this we emerged into the wide ocean, where we

rolled so badly it took me all my time to prevent myself from being flung overboard.

A couple of hours later a little horse-shoe bay opened on our starboard: the surf creaming in an unbroken line along the shore appeared not to afford us the slightest anchorage. I knew, however, there must be one, because I could see a comparatively large village.

"What's that place?" I asked.

"Nombre de Dios, Name of God," Midge replied, "and this is Nombre de Dios Bay, where the Spaniards first landed; which they did because they couldn't help it, and after finding themselves on dry land, history relates they looked out to sea and cried: 'Nombre de Dios! how are we ever going to get out?' and from that day to this the name has never been changed. There's a little river somewhere near, into which we can creep."

I could not see any river entrance, and we seemed to be running straight into the shore. Then unexpectedly behind some trees appeared a tiny opening, so small that it seemed impossible the yacht could pass. Going dead slow Robbie went into the bow and commenced to heave the lead. Slowly we crept out of the horrid turmoil behind us, and up what was really a narrow stream no more than 30 feet wide. A hundred yards from the mouth we stopped. It was not necessary to drop anchor as we had gently grounded.

"You'll like this queer old place," said Midge. "We'll have Robbie row us ashore."

This we did, and a quarter of a mile upstream found ourselves in the centre of the "town," where I was again an object of curiosity to the natives, who much resembled those of Porto Bello.

The majority of the houses were the usual bamboo and thatched huts, raised slightly above the ground on stumpy wooden piles. The little church, which could not have been used for ages, was in a pitifully tumble-

down condition, and an air of decay pervaded everything. I was, however, surprised to find a ramshackle store presided over by the ubiquitous Chink. How he ever got there is hard to imagine.

The houses were built on either side of the stream up which we had rowed, with a foot bridge from one side to the other. Like the town itself, this was also in a terribly ramshackle condition. The illustration gives a slight idea of its construction.

Occasionally large alligators wandered along close to the shore, but the natives apparently take no notice of them. Their apathy is quite remarkable. But the saddest sight of all we saw on returning to the yacht. We found a white man—a typical beach-comber. He was either English or American; he didn't seem to know which. He was very old, and spoke to us in a stilted, high-pitched voice, as if he were afraid to hear himself speak. He had somehow drifted there, and become stranded like the sea flotsam, and now eked out a miserable existence.

The weather still continued very bad outside, so we determined to remain overnight. As soon as it got dusk, I found myself saying "*Nombre de Dios!*" on my own account—the mosquitoes were awful—they swarmed everywhere. I suppose I am particularly toothsome, judging by the way they always devour me.

On waking we decided to make the San Blas in one long run if possible, and get through the outer reefs into calm water before night. It took a little time to manœuvre the yacht out of the river, but when once this was done the discomfort was dreadful. We were tumbling and rolling in a frightful manner, when Midge cheered me up by telling me there was no anchorage within eighty miles. However, I soon got used to the sea, though at times it seemed as though we must capsize.

What a cruel coast! Every now and then steep

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rocky capes jutted out, in the background of which the impenetrable forests and mountains were always to be seen.

At the end of six hours or so we passed a death-trap called the Escribanos Reef, which is three miles off-shore, and later John George pointed out in the dim distance a strip of land which projected into the sea.

"Cape San Blas," he told us.

It looked very far off; and as we drew nearer the sea became worse and I could plainly see running out from the point a reef the length of which it was impossible to determine, as it continued until it merged into the horizon. Without warning we were lifted into the air and all of a sudden plunged into a roaring vortex of water.

"For God's sake nose her out, John!" roared Midge.

The mountainous sea on which we had been raised curled and broke about 20 feet off the starboard side.

"Nose her out, man, nose her out!" he called again; "we'll be hurled and smashed to pieces on the reef if you don't."

Our little boat swung hard to port and staggered out to sea. I thought we had indeed had a narrow escape, but it was child's play to what followed.

It was a wonderful sight to see the majestic rollers curling in with irresistible strength; as they reared their great crests the sun, shining through, gave the most perfect aquamarine tints—beautiful, yes, but how cruel!

"John, where's that opening?" called Midge; "I can't see anything except a wall of water. Can you see any opening?" he added, turning to me. "There's a break somewhere, and we've got to get through it; look hard for a calmer piece of water."

We still chugged onwards with no sign of the long-looked-for opening.

"Hard to starboard!" he suddenly shouted.

I thought my last hour had come ; it appeared as if we were driving full tilt to certain destruction. Huge waves seemed as if they were rushing on us—every moment I expected them to engulf the yacht and ourselves, but always by some miracle we crawled over and they rolled on.

In the midst of this roaring hell I managed to shout :

“ Are we all right ? ”

There was no answer ; but presently I saw that we were passing in where one reef ended and another a little farther out began. As we crept under the lee of the seaward barrier the terrifying rollers subsided, and within a few minutes we were gliding on a perfectly calm, unrippled surface.

“ Thank goodness we’re safe ! ” I said—and the words had hardly left my mouth when Midge gave a roar that fairly made me jump. He flung old John George away from the wheel and I felt the yacht swing right round.

“ Good God ! look ahead ! ” and there in the clear water, not six inches beneath the surface I could plainly see a coral reef. He then threw the control of the engine over until we were only just creeping along.

“ By Jove, Mabs, that was a near one—ten seconds more and we’d have been piled up and that would have been the end of our journey.”

Robbie and John were now in the bow of the boat watching the depth while Midge steered. Presently we crept through a tiny opening in the reef with only a few inches to spare on either side. Three-quarters of an hour more and down went the anchor.

Never did I dream I should see such a vista of loveliness—it surpassed anything I could even have imagined. Tiny islands, palm-clad, with golden sandy beaches set in an unrippled sapphire sea. A sense of perfect peace surrounded us, but the deep boom of the mighty breakers

bursting on the reef behind was a constant reminder of what we had gone through.

The late afternoon sun was still shining gloriously. We had eaten nothing the whole day and I felt simply ravenous.

" Midge, I'm starving ! "

" All right, let's get the lines out and try our luck. "

With a piece of smoked cod for bait he struck and landed in a few minutes a yellow tail and in an incredibly short space of time we caught eight, which were at once prepared and absolutely gobbled up. I don't know when I enjoyed a meal more.

Early next morning I had a feeling that someone was near, and looked up to find a little dug-out alongside, in which sat an Indian and his woman. They made the most curious picture I had ever seen. They were light copper in colour. The man was dressed in a dilapidated-looking shirt and trousers ; the woman had her head and most of her face covered with a brilliant figured scarf, while her dress consisted of a remarkable-looking top, rather like a jumper, with another piece of cloth wrapped round her waist. Neither smiled nor spoke, but sat looking perfectly blank, never once taking their eyes off me. I called out, " Heavenly Powers ! who are they ? "

" San Blas Indians. "

Midge had picked up a smattering of their language on his previous trip, and nodding to them he said " Nueddee, " to which they replied by using the same word.

By signs and a few words he managed to ask them what they wanted, but they conveyed that they didn't want anything, and although it was over an hour before we left they did not speak a word, even to one another, but sat staring like frightened children.

As we pulled up our anchor the woman stood to push the little dug-out off from our side, and I saw that her

ankles were tightly encircled with coloured bead anklets—so tight that the calf of the leg was swollen out above them, distorting the shape, and as her head covering fell back from her arms, I noticed the same curious ornaments were bound just above the wrist in exactly the same way.

They were a revelation to me, but Midge told me that they, no doubt, had seen white people before, as on the outskirts of their territory they came in touch with a few trading schooners, but far into their archipelago, where we were going, a white man was probably unknown, and they had certainly never seen a white woman before.

"I think if successful we'll be staggered by what we'll see," said Midge. "If what I'm told is true the tribe inland exists just as they were thousands of years ago."

We could faintly see some other islands like dark smudges on the horizon; they appeared to be the farthest from the mainland. It was impossible to know if we could reach them until we tried, but it meant extremely careful navigation, owing to the innumerable coral reefs. However, we determined to have a shot at it.

We had not gone far before we struck a broad channel, over a mile in width, where rollers from the main sea raced through a great break in the outer barrier. It seemed to me that compressed in this comparatively small space the water was even rougher than outside and we rolled terribly. All at once there was a dreadful crash from below. I jumped up, while Midge staggered along the side of the boat down into the cabin to find what had gone wrong. I thought at first we had struck some unseen rock, but he quickly returned telling me not to worry—that our violent motion had flung one of the guns and a case of ammunition from one side to the other, but that no damage had been done, and

very soon we were across and into dead calm water again in the lee of some coral and sand shoals, which were just clear of the water—no doubt little islands in the making.

The smudges we had seen on the horizon now definitely resolved themselves into palm-clad islands, but before arriving there we entered a lagoon where the sea was a deep green in colour—perfectly smooth, the great ocean rollers being kept out by several sand and coral banks, like those we had passed, with an islet in the centre. It was so peaceful that we decided to drop anchor and explore the vicinity, so getting into the dinghy we rowed out towards the banks. The water soon shallowed to a foot or so in depth.

We only wore our bathing costumes and rubber-soled shoes—the latter, as I have already said, most necessary, as the bottom of tropical seas is always strewn with sea-eggs and sharp pieces of coral, not to mention sea-centipedes and other horrors, which make it not only positively dangerous but impossible to walk without something on one's feet. So we got out and waded.

This shallow water, as smooth as glass, extended right and left for some distance over pure sand, the innumerable life of the marine world beneath the surface being a source of endless wonder to me—sponges, shells, and all kinds of strange objects that I had never seen before filled me with interest.

We were making for the islet. It had quite a comical appearance—there were eleven tall palm trees growing in the centre of about a quarter of an acre of dry sand. On reaching it we discovered a tiny flat hut made of palm leaves, and as we drew closer two natives peered out. They were covered in such rags that, if ever taken off, they could never have been put on again. Their little dug-out was drawn up opposite where we had landed. I have no idea what nationality they were,

but one of them spoke a few words of very broken English.

They gave us to understand that they were turtle-fishing for hawk's-bill, from the shell of which are manufactured the more expensive combs and toilet articles of real tortoiseshell. They showed me how to get some beautiful queen shells by wading out a little way off—also other delicate specimens like butterfly wings.

The poor fellows were in a terrible plight, and had been out there for twenty-four hours without water. We had fortunately filled some large empty petrol tins at Nombre de Dios, so Midge told them that if they paddled to the yacht, they could have two of them, and their gratitude was really pathetic. They were alongside waiting for us before we returned. When we handed them the tins one of them gave me a magnificent piece of tortoiseshell, large enough to make a dressing-table tray. I really didn't like taking it, but Midge told me it meant nothing to them, and drew a lurid picture of what would have happened if we had not given them water.

Later in the afternoon we caught some more fish and old John George got us half a dozen green coco-nuts, so that night we had a great feed of fresh fish, coco-nut water, and biscuits for supper.

CHAPTER VII

OUR FIRST LANDING AMONG THE SAN BLAS INDIANS— IN THE MIDST OF ANOTHER WORLD

I SLEPT as I never sleep at home, and on waking was surprised to find that we had started and already covered some miles. I had just got into my bathing costume and brown overall I wore on deck when I heard loud shouts from above. I tumbled out quickly. Right ahead of us stretched a submerged coral reef only a few inches below the surface. We had swung hard to port and were going dead slow. On the other side of the barrier lay the islands we had seen on the horizon the previous day, and for some distance we crept along, but could find no opening to pass through, so turned and went the other way, but without result.

"It's no use," Midge said, "we've got to go back; there's no way we can cross."

"Don't say we've got to face that awful rough channel again," I groaned.

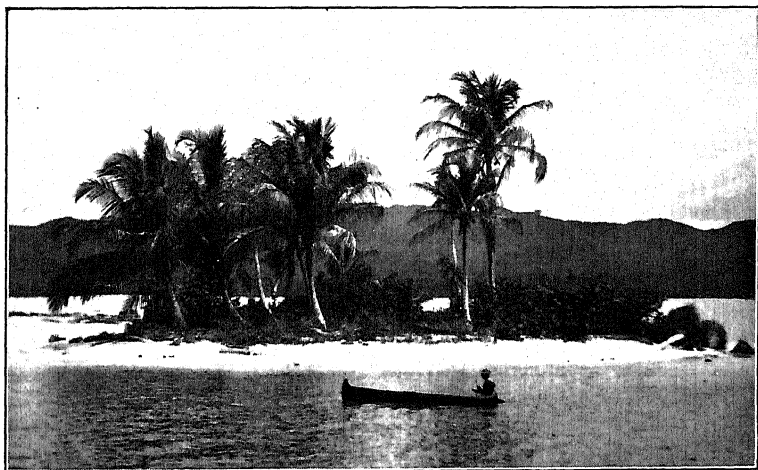
"I don't know," he replied, "we may be able to avoid it, but I know no more than you about these waters—nor does anyone else—it's a case of groping."

We had to go right back into it, but this time, fortunately, on entering the tumbling mass we swung round so that the roll was behind us and drove in towards the mainland. We soon saw ahead of us a large island, which as we neared it appeared to be entirely covered by huts and behind this we ran.

Here I saw my first real San Blas village. The thatched huts were crowded close together down to



FIRST SAN BLAS VILLAGE AT WHICH WE LANDED (p. 60).



MINIATURE ISLAND OFF TIGRE (p. 66).

the water's edge and seemed to have no space between them at all. As we came nearer both men and women flocked to the shore. Some of their dug-outs put off filled with men only, and came alongside. They were dressed like the first I had seen, except that many of them had enormous gold discs hanging from their ears and quite a number were bare to the waist.

Midge went ashore taking the medicine chest with him, but I decided to stay on the yacht and work on my diary. He was not long away, returning presently to tell me the Chief and his head-man were coming on board to eat with us.

The first thing that struck me about the Chief was that in appearance he was quite different from the rest. Instead of the round head and face with flattened nose, his features were almost classical—in fact he was quite a handsome man. He was accompanied by his head-man and two children, the latter completely naked.

I was surprised at the intelligence he displayed in eating. Although he had never seen a knife and fork before he carefully waited and watched what we did with them, and then imitated us, and his manners would have set an example to many a white man.

Midge talked with him slowly, making signs all the time, and their language appeared to me to be very simple and easily learnt—in fact as time passed we were able to make ourselves quite well understood.

After they had gone I got my camera to take a photograph of the village from the yacht, as we were lying only a few yards from the shore and I could easily get a view from the deck. But no sooner did they see the apparatus than the entire population fled with a yell in a disorderly rout. I wondered what could be the matter with them until Midge, who was standing by, said :

“ I believe it's the camera they don't like, and they think you're going to cast a spell on them.”

However, I got my photographs of the village, but the people remained entirely hidden until darkness fell.

Soon after the sun had gone down we heard a remarkable wailing noise. It was their native music, and its strains were the most mournful I have ever heard.

Before we left next day some of them came off in their boats and made us presents, consisting of a bunch of plantains and four bananas, and Midge then made them understand how pleased we should be if they would give us one of their musical instruments. They seemed quite glad to do so, paddled ashore and brought one back. It simply consisted of four pieces of hollow reed down which they blew, producing the sad notes which I had heard.

Their courage had apparently revived during the night, for they all appeared on shore as we pulled up our anchor, but as we left and gave them three blasts with the siren they again bolted *en masse* for cover.

After leaving we passed numerous other islands, most of which appeared deserted, but in the afternoon came to another of their crowded villages.

One remarkable fact which I shall never be able to understand was that the people on this island actually knew we were coming. It is beyond me to explain how; and they had evidently also learnt that we had no evil intentions towards them, for they received us with the greatest friendliness, putting out in their dug-outs as we stopped. I saw them smile for the first time, and they all said the same word "nueddee."

There was no variation in their dress, the men wearing the queer smock-like shirt worn outside the trousers, with a little straw hat perched on top of their heads.

On going ashore we were at once escorted by the male population to the Chief's hut, and found him prepared to receive us. We talked to him slowly for over an hour, during the whole of which time none of

the men took their eyes off me. I was wearing breeches and boots and carried guns in my belt.

The Chief explained that they had a lot of sickness ; so Midge went back to the yacht to get his medicine chest while I remained on shore. When he returned the whole population crowded round.

An idea then seemed to strike the Chief, and he suggested we should visit all the huts, saying he was sure there must be someone ill in every one of them.

" This is going to be a long operation," said Midge to me, but he agreed, only suggesting that as he was doctoring them they should give him a " pincher " (i.e. present) in return. This pleased them immensely, and off we went to the first hut, escorted as usual by the whole lot.

They were indeed a sick people, chief among their numerous complaints being a severe form of itch. However, we started manfully, the patient sitting stolidly while being doctored, the other natives crowding round in a circle. As soon as one had been attended to a regular contagion spread among them ; every human being in the place seemed to possess an ailment of some sort, and there was quite a competition as to who should offer the biggest present to ensure prior attention. This went on the whole day.

We found that as well as the itch many of them were suffering from horrible cuts which had festered. One man had a large thorn embedded deeply in his foot. It must have been a terribly painful operation to have it cut out, but not a murmur escaped him. The thing that excited them more than anything else was the effect that permanganate of potash had on clear water. That it should turn magenta was looked on as a miracle, and I could hardly keep a straight face when, having given the people in one hut a bottle they sent us a message to say another person was very ill and needed the wonderful medicine. We gave them

another bottle, but an urgent summons came for yet a third supply, for which more presents were given. They only wanted to indulge in the childish delight of seeing the water change colour. They were told they must not drink it, but must only use it for bathing cuts.

In one hut we visited it was surprising to find two Indian women and a boy absolutely white, with palest straw-coloured hair; they were albinos, and were not looked upon with particular favour by the rest of the Indians who supposed them to be unlucky.

The male children, without exception, were entirely naked practically to manhood; the girls from infancy were clothed in a miniature replica of the women's dress, a garment with an extraordinary patch-work top. From the waist to the ankle they were swathed, like the Cingalese, in a single piece of cloth, which was figured. All wore gold nose-rings.

When a girl child is born the nose is pierced and a piece of vine is first put through the hole, to be afterwards superseded by the ring.

The women wore no earrings, but had masses of coloured seed and other necklaces, while their ankles and arms had the tight bead bands which I have already described. On their heads they all wore a vividly coloured piece of cloth reaching to the waist. It is astonishing how they managed to keep this on, especially in a strong breeze, as it was quite loose.

A dug-out would frequently come in from one of the other islands or the mainland, filled only with women. As they passed the yacht they invariably covered their faces, with the exception of one eye, by a dexterous manipulation of their head-cloth. They did the same thing when walking about on shore, but inside their dwellings this shyness—or whatever it was—forsook them, for they not only discarded the head-cloth but even the top garment as well, leaving themselves naked

to the waist, and suckled their children openly without the slightest trace of embarrassment.

Before the babies can walk they are carried on the hip. The mother supports the little mite with one arm, while it has a leg on either side of her body. This at first sight looks a difficult feat, but comes quite natural to them, the practice having been followed for generations.

The men were all dressed in the curious shirt worn hanging outside the trousers. Many of them had huge gold disc earrings, while now and again in front of the little straw hat was stuck some ludicrous article, such as an old nail, a large berry, or a piece of tin.

Every woman had her cheeks smeared with some red substance, with a black line straight down from the forehead to the tip of the nose. This dye is got from nut kernels growing on the mainland.

Some of the men had their cheeks smeared in the same way, and the girl children without exception had their faces treated like the women.

The instinct of cleanliness and sanitation was so strange that it must be touched on. At all hours of the day men, women, and children, those too small to walk being carried, could be seen going up to their waists into the sea. With a delicacy one would not expect, and in contradistinction to many of their other traits, the men went to one side of the island, while the women took the other. In this way they solved what to us would be a real problem. Otherwise the islands would have been most offensive, owing to the heat and crowded conditions under which the people live.

The custom is all the more remarkable when one takes into consideration how appallingly dirty some of their other habits are. Even the smallest child expectorates freely, and pieces of chewed-up sugar cane and all kinds of other refuse are strewn about without any attempt at cleaning up.

The name of this island I learnt was Tigre.

The huts of the Indians were built among the coco-nut palms that grew in abundance, and were not set quite so close together as those we had first visited. The whole effect was delightfully picturesque.

About a quarter of a mile offshore a coral reef ran out from a beautiful miniature island of pure sand, graceful palm trees growing in its centre. At the end of the day it was a real delight to find on rowing out to it that behind appeared a perfect sandy basin about four feet deep, encircled by a little coral reef. Nature could not have provided a more perfect bath, and after the dust inside the village, and being surrounded by Indians all day, it was a luxury to be able to lie safely protected from sharks in the limpid, warm water.

The view of the mainland, only a mile or two distant, was exquisite, and the illustration will perhaps give some idea of the appearance of the islet, with the mountains of the mainland in the background.

The sea abounded with fish, and we had no difficulty in supplying ourselves, as it was only necessary to cast out from the shore opposite the place where we bathed. The beach shelved steeply, and while engaged in fishing the dangers lurking in the depths were vividly brought home to me, for quite close inshore the dorsal fin of a shark slowly rippled the surface. Horrible brute—it quite spoilt my hopes of further bathes except under the most guarded circumstances.

Next morning we were hard at it again soon after the sun rose, as we could not finish our doctoring in the one day.

About 1 o'clock we got away. After leaving our cosy little anchorage we met with a regular gale. The size of the rollers terrified me—all the life seemed to leave me and I could hardly breathe at times. At last I simply had to turn to Midge, who up to now had not seemed to notice. He reassured me as well as he could,



SAN BLAS VILLAGE OF TIGRE (p. 66).



SAN BLAS VILLAGE OF NEADUPO (p. 69).

but I was still frantically nervous. Jagged reefs seemed to rise on either side of us, with mountainous seas curling over them, and once we appeared to be actually running on one, only to swing hard over at the last moment and literally dive through a narrow channel under the lee. I was never in my life more thankful than to see another island with a long barrier running out from the point, breaking the force of the sea; as we ran nearer it became calmer every minute, until at last it was quite peaceful.

We dropped anchor and again got a glimpse of another fairy world. This in its turn was different from the rest. It is strange how the scenery, although one would expect to find the same type all through, always varied. The Indian huts, as at Tigre, were built among the coco-nut palms, but quite detached with the added beauty of lovely flowering vines and banana trees, while the ground between the dwellings was covered with masses of white and pink flowers similar to periwinkle.

As in the other islands, the people knew of our coming and were all assembled and waiting for us. The greatest excitement prevailed among them, very unlike the stoicism they had at first displayed. They knew we were friendly and evidently the news had reached them of the wonderful curative power, as they believed, of our medicines. As usual their little dug-outs put off to us and we were swamped with presents of plantains, bananas, and—for the first time—splendid large pine-apples, limes, and dozens of avocardo pears.

Up to now we were faring much better for food than I had expected. I was already beginning to understand a good deal of their very simple language, in which one word often means a great deal. For example "nueddee," the literal translation of which is "good," is always used for greeting, irrespective of the time of day. Suppose an Indian were to bring in a big catch of fish, the others would gather round, and instead of a flow of

68 UNKNOWN TRIBES, UNCHARTED SEAS

voluble remarks, such as we might make, they would simply nod and say "nueddee." Or if the sea were too rough for their little dug-outs to go to the mainland, there would be no conversation or argument when the wind subsided—merely a nodding of the head and the use of the one word "nueddee."

The reason for the simplicity of the language is that their vocabulary is extremely limited. It is a question whether it consists of more than two hundred words.

It was not long before we could converse with them reasonably well. We were greatly helped in this by the fact that on the first island at which we called by some strange chance we ran across a San Blas Indian who had adventured on a little trading schooner, owned by a native of the island of St. Andrew, which is about 200 miles out in the Caribbean off the coast of Costa Rica. A form of English is largely spoken, and hence from the St. Andrew natives he had picked up a few words. On our suggesting that he should come with us on the yacht he seemed quite pleased at the further opportunity to "see the world." Therefore, apart from conversing with the Indians with whom we actually came in contact, we talked with him in our spare time, which was a wonderful help.

CHAPTER VIII

THE INDIANS VEST US WITH SUPERNATURAL POWERS AND
THE CAPTURE OF A 900-POUND FISH DEEPENS THEIR AWE

THE island at which we had now arrived was called by the Indians Neadupo. The Chief's head-man, who had come out in a dug-out, gave us to understand that the Sagala (Chief) would be glad to see us ; but it was late in the afternoon, and as we had risen so early, had done quite a lot of work on the other island, and had had such a tumbling on our journey, we explained that we should be very glad to come early next morning. So Midge sent him a present—a little bit of red silk ribbon, about half a yard long.

Soon after darkness fell we were again regaled with their curious, mournful music.

Midge had two mysterious boxes on board, and suddenly he turned to me and said :

“ The United States Government shops at Colon were good enough to let me have two big boxes of red flares. I had a reason for bringing them. I'm going to light one and see what happens.”

We took them out ; they were about a foot long, and were fitted with a wooden handle so that we could hold them while burning. Standing on the yacht and facing the island we lit one.

The effect was magical. As the red blaze illuminated the island and scenery round, we could distinctly see that large numbers of the Indians were congregated on the beach. A long, loud, gasping “ Oh ! ” of wonder—almost of horror—came across the water ; they were so

terrified that for a moment they were rooted to the spot, when in silence they appeared to dissolve, and the beach was entirely deserted in a very few minutes. After that not another sound broke the stillness of the night.

I expected to find their dug-outs clustering round us as usual, as soon as day broke, but no boat came out, nor could we see a single Indian.

Robbie rowed us ashore in the yacht's dinghy, but when we landed the place was as silent as the grave—not a sign of life.

We walked to the first hut, and on stooping to enter the little aperture, which is usually only about 4 feet in height, we found men, women, and children huddled inside.

Turning to me in amazement, Midge said: "What on earth is the matter with them?"

"Do you think it was the red flares last night?" I suggested, equally mystified.

"My God! I believe you're right!" he answered.

He spoke to the men, who at first seemed too numbed to answer.

"I've got to reassure them somehow," he said, "they're frightened to death; just watch while I tell them this."

With much difficulty he managed to convey to them that the blaze of red fire occurred when he was communicating with the great spirits, and that they had told him that the Indians were very good people and in need of help. He further went on to explain that he had heard of their sickness in this way, and had come with the great god's medicine to cure them.

The effect of this was magical. They started up in amazement, their delight being indescribable. Several of the men immediately ran out of the house and before long the inside of the hut, which was about 30 feet long and 20 feet wide, was packed solidly with people—

all of them men, while outside the rest of the population assembled. Silence prevailed both inside and outside the long dark dwelling. The people gazed on us with awe.

Midge whispered in my ear :

" Do you know, I really believe they think we are gods. We are no longer a man and a woman. What they have heard of the way we have doctored the other Indians, which is sure to have been exaggerated, added to the red blaze last night, has convinced them we are supernatural. When this news spreads, as it's bound to do, it'll open everywhere for us."

A few minutes later the Chief's head-man arrived with a message asking us to go to the Chief's house, and amidst the same silence we left.

The wonderful sight as we emerged from the dim interior into the blaze of sunshine outside will always be remembered. A little path opened for us between the line of assembled women and children, all of whom gazed on us with what I can only describe as the greatest reverence, and as we passed through they formed up behind and accompanied us in a body to the Chief's house.

On reaching this we found it to be larger than the others. It was about 60 feet in length by 40 feet wide, the top of the thatched roof being quite 25 feet from the ground. A hammock was swung in the centre in which reposed the Chief of the island.

Small stools without legs, merely blocks of wood, hard as iron and very heavy, slightly hollowed in the centre, were placed in front and on either side. We sat on those in front of the Chief, while the others were occupied by his head-men. The rest of the male population stood up all round.

The Chief nodded gravely, using the usual word of greeting. We returned it. He then asked us several questions as to how and why we had come, and I felt

myself blushing when Midge told the tale we had rehearsed, filling it in with more detail this time.

I saw a medicine man here for the first time. He sat close to the Chief and listened intently to every word that was said.

The Chief told us that there were many sick people, and Midge then suggested that the medicine man should go with him, as the great spirits wished him to be told how to cure the Indians in the future, and that he would leave him behind some of the great god's medicine, in order that he might do it. At this the medicine man positively swelled with importance—his prestige for the future would be enormously enhanced, and no doubt he had visions of large numbers of presents in the way of coco-nuts, fish, and fruit.

We started off on our round and found much the same conditions as at Tigre. They all wanted doctoring, but first of all we visited the medicine man's house and found his wife in a terrible state of itch, for which we used sulphur ointment.

As we went from house to house we remarked how beautiful were the natural gardens in which they were built: besides the pink and white periwinkle which flowered everywhere, a large ground vine with glorious mauve flowers, very like a giant convolvulus, threaded in and out through the maze. The banana trees and coco-nut palms casting their shade added to the restful effect.

One could not help contrasting the lovely natural aspect presented by this village with some of the hideous modern seaside resorts which one sees so freely advertised in the guide-books of England and America.

Everywhere we went we were given presents, and continued our doctoring, finding the children on all the islands very bad with hook-worm.

We had reached our anchorage off this island by entering through a neck in a reef which opened out as

soon as we had passed, forming quite a deep lake-like piece of water. What with the heat, the atmosphere inside the dwellings, and being surrounded by Indians all the morning, we felt it was too strenuous to keep up for the rest of the day; we therefore returned to the yacht for food, and Midge determined to fish from the boat. When he produced his tackle the Indians were amazed. They, naturally, had never seen a rod or reel before, and when, as usual, they surrounded the yacht they still could not understand what he was going to do.

The line had only been in the water a few minutes before he struck and landed a nurse-shark, and cutting off a portion of the flesh, within a very short time was fast into a shovel-nose. This fish put up a tremendous fight. Not only the Indians in their boats, but also those on the beach watched the whole proceeding with the greatest interest, looking on it as a fresh sign of miraculous powers that one should be able to catch such mighty fish in this way.

Its final capture was accomplished by Midge being rowed to the island, and from there he played the shark, gradually working it close inshore. As soon as its back was clear of the water, after it had grounded in the shallows, Robbie, using the rifle they had taken with them, fired two bullets in quick succession into it. As the steel missiles thudded home the shark lashed round with its tail, sending the water flying in all directions.

The rifle was in such constant use that I had hardly noticed the reports. Imagine my surprise when, immediately after Robbie had fired, I saw many of the Indians who were clustering round, both men, women, and children, tumble clean over, the rest of them standing stock-still for perhaps a second or so, when with one accord they bolted, disappearing like rabbits into their holes. Midge promptly went after them,

and in the end persuaded them to come back, whereupon they helped to drag the fish, now dead, up on the land.

All the time he had been fighting this fish both of us had noticed another, much larger one, following it closely, and frequently side by side with it. We could plainly see every movement in the clear water as it circled round and round, so after the Indians had hauled up the one he had caught he divided it, put the pieces in the dinghy, rowed them out and dropped them in the water, but reserved several large chunks for bait.

We had some shark lines in the cabin, so got them on deck, and after impaling a large piece of shark flesh on one of the big hooks, lowered it into the dinghy, rowed it about 30 yards from the yacht, and dropped it in about the same place as we had deposited the rest of the carcase, and in a few minutes off went the line.

Now, indeed, were the Indians thoroughly amazed, for there is no doubt they had never seen a huge fish like this hooked before.

After a tremendous struggle which lasted for some time, we finally got the end of the line on shore, and, with the help of the Indians, slowly but surely got the brute into the shallow water and despatched it. It was truly hideous—again a shovel-nose shark.

Sounds signifying their wonderment could be heard from all the Indians as the great creature was brought to land, and our prestige was much enhanced. There is no doubt they loathe sharks, but they can never catch them, having no means of so doing, and our success with tackle such as they had never seen before caused them more than ever to think of us as supernatural beings. We were indeed "Sagala Tumatis" (i.e. Great Chiefs).

Midge opened up this shark and removed the vertebræ and jaws, which we took back with us to the yacht,

putting them out on the bow to dry in the sun, and from that time on till it was dark every male Indian in the place must have come out to have a look at them.

It took us till early in the afternoon of the next day to finish doctoring, when we again met the Chief to say good-bye. He rejoiced in the name of Eguabinigia.

I noticed his features, like those of the Sagala at Tigre, were different from the rest, being much finer cut ; he conformed in every detail to my idea of the ancient Aztecs. Midge told me he had noticed the same type in the Mosquitia.

He was quite distressed we were leaving and begged us to return, assuring us he and his people would always be overjoyed to receive us, but we explained that much healing work with the " medicine of the gods " lay before us, and that many more Indians were sick on the other islands and needed us—therefore we had to go.

As the yacht went out through the reef the Indians gathered on the shore to take a silent farewell, and I must say I felt rather miserable, for I have never seen a friendlier or happier people.

On reaching the open sea the weather was much better than on our previous run. For the first time since we entered the San Blas territory we could see no islands ahead. We ran close in to the mainland, and shortly a bold cape jutted out into the sea off our bow. At last I was able to see clearly, instead of an indistinct blur, the landscape and vegetation.

The scenery was grand in its immensity, but it gave me a feeling akin to fear—it was so utterly lonely and wild—forbidding in its impenetrability.

A few miles inland stretched a great range of mountains, clothed in a solid wall of dense forest, which extended from their foot down to the sea-shore without a break. Twice we passed rivers, and had to be extremely careful in our navigation where the second entered the sea, as many huge dead trees and masses

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of wood had been carried down owing to a deluge up in the hills, and were floating about flush with the surface. Had we struck any when going full speed it would have been like running on a rock.

Immediately we rounded the cape we came on more islands. They were quite tiny, and as we passed we could see they were uninhabited. The afternoon was getting on and we were anxious to find a good anchorage ; to continue running in darkness would have been madness.

About a mile off was an island larger than those just left astern and for this we made, determining to anchor there for the night. On nearing we went dead slow, gently feeling our way in. We passed through two reefs, and nosed till our bow just touched the sand bottom close to the shore.

There seemed to be no rise and fall in the sea out here, so there was little fear of the tide ebbing and leaving us dry, which would have been attended by the discomfort of heeling over. We were so near the beach that instead of putting out an anchor Robbie let himself down into the water with a rope previously fastened to the capstan and, wading ashore, tied it round one of the coco-nut palms with which, as usual, the island was covered, and which were here growing right down to the water's edge. The place was pleasantly free from mosquitoes, and there was hardly any breeze.

We only just arrived in time, for no sooner had we fixed up comfortably than darkness closed. As we sat on deck for our evening meal every now and then we heard big splashes on either side of us. We had still got a few little pieces of shark flesh which we had kept in case we needed them for bait, and having nothing better to do we both cast out, not really hoping to get anything, as it seemed absurd to expect large fish to pass through the reef. I had not been fishing more than a few minutes when the rod was nearly torn out

of my hands. I was taken quite by surprise, and reeled in to find the hook snapped clean off above the barb.

"Better put on a bigger one," advised Midge, "I won't fish, but will just watch you. I expect one or two sharks have come in."

I changed my tackle, fixing a strong wire lead and a much larger hook on the line, and cast out again. It had not been in the water five minutes when away went a fish.

I struck—the top of the rod bent over.

"Brake hard!" cried Midge, "you're into a big one!"

I put all the pressure I dared on the line.

"I'm afraid you're going to lose your tackle again," said Midge; "the fish will be into the reef in a minute."

By using all my strength I just managed to turn it in time, and back again into the few feet of water where the bottom was sandy, when, after playing it for over half an hour, I worked it alongside the boat where Robbie gaffed it.

I expected to see a small shark, and was surprised to find it was a big snapper.

With the aid of the gaff the fish was heaved up on deck. It was a beautiful fellow, and must have weighed 50 pounds.

"Good business," said Midge, "you've caught our breakfast."

A bucket was filled with sea water, and the best portions were cut out and dropped into it to keep overnight.

A little later we went ashore, Robbie carrying the lantern. It was suggested we should see if we could find some turtles, which at this time of year come up on the sandy beach to deposit their eggs; so we walked along the edge, Robbie leading with the light, hoping to have some luck.

We must have gone nearly round the island when in

the stillness an awful scuffle and plunging in the water made me jump.

"Damn it!" cried Midge, "we've missed her—there goes mother turtle!"

She must only just have come up on the sand. Had we arrived a few minutes later she would have been high up and could never have got back into the water before we caught her.

Having caught the breakfast, I had a sneaking feeling of pleasure that the honours were not divided. When we got back Midge proposed we should play a game of cards, of which he never seemed to weary. It was one of the innumerable Patience games, known as "Miss Milligan." Our nightly table did not strike me as unusual at the time, but the madness of it has often since come vividly before me, and I am sure many people would have looked on us as lunatics. We carried 600 gallons of petrol with us, part of which was stacked in the cock-pit in wooden cases. The electrical storm at Porto Bello having disorganised the lighting of the boat, we had recourse to candles. Fortunately we had a good supply, and by the friendly gleam of them, stuck on top of a petrol case for a table, we spread the cards. There is no doubt that had there been a little leak in any of the tins I should not be writing my experiences to-day.

Resuming our journey at daybreak we made towards the mainland, running parallel about a mile offshore. We had only gone a few miles when a tiny natural bay opened out, and here big hills running down almost to the edge of the sea—with in one place a little break which looked as if it might be a river—made such a delightful picture as to tempt us to see if it would not be possible to land.

Up till now we had only landed on islands, having never explored the coast. We commenced to creep in, but the treacherous nature of the terrible reefs which

lay close to the beach seemed to afford no anchorage. Midge turned to me.

"Do you see a calm piece of water at the back of the reef over there?"

I looked in the direction in which he was pointing, and could see what he described.

"Well, there must be a break somewhere," he added, "although it's hidden from us for the moment; we'll crawl close in and investigate."

Sure enough when only about 50 yards off we could descry a tiny channel which, owing to the dark blue of the water, we knew must be very deep. It was just as if it had been blasted and chiselled out by manual labour. It could not have been more than 20 feet in width.

"For heaven's sake don't try and get in there; we'll never get out again," I exclaimed.

"If we can get in we can get out," retorted Midge.

Going dead slow we crept through the passage, and floated in a most remarkable miniature harbour. It was completely encircled with the reef, except for this break, on the land side a steep mass of rock rising up almost exactly like a harbour wall.

The depth of the water so close to the rocky shore reminded me very much of certain places in Cornwall.

CHAPTER IX

MY FIRST EXPERIENCES OF THE PRIMEVAL JUNGLE—WE PASS TWO NIGHTS OF HORROR

ON dropping the anchor we found this pool was so deep that it was impossible to touch bottom, so we moored the boat by passing a rope round the rocks on shore and thence to the bow capstan, and fastened the stern in the same manner to the coral reef which reared up some feet above the surface. Nothing could have been snugger. For all the movement there was one might as well have been on land.

We got into our breeches and boots, and put guns in our belts. Midge carried his rifle and I the shot gun. We also took food with us, having determined to light a fire and feed on land ; and so we got into the dinghy and had Robbie put us ashore.

We left him here to do the cooking. He also carried a gun, and after arranging that he should fire three times in quick succession if he wanted us urgently, and that we would do the same if we wanted him, we started off.

After climbing over some rather difficult rocks close to the side of the water, we came to a perfect sandy beach and walked along it for about a mile to where we thought we had seen the break caused by a river. Reaching it we found it was, as we had surmised, a stream entering the sea, but the extraordinary part was that where the bush ended it disappeared, burrowing beneath the sandy beach through a sort of natural

tunnel. Unless the Indians had visited this spot, there is no doubt it was the first time any other person had landed there.

We proposed to follow the course of the river, which was quite narrow, inland. Here the jungle was so dense that in many places it was only by the free use of a machete which he carried that Midge could clear a track.

As the jungle walled us round in its sinister embrace, a vague sense of malevolent surveillance gripped me, and increased till terror engulfed me. My lips framed the words "Go back!" but something inside stifled them—I was compelled to go on—it wasn't courage—it was something I can't explain. The feeling increased with every step. I longed for something to break the tension of my strung-up nerves. It came.

"Shoot quick!" shouted Midge, "on your left—up the tree!"

As my gun automatically came to my shoulder my fingers trembled on the trigger. I saw a huge iguano (land-lizard) lying on a branch about 20 feet above the ground. I fired and down it came with a crash. We went over and examined the strange-looking creature. Its squat legs were armed with very strong claws. Beneath the snaky-looking head the flesh fell away in a sort of pouch, while its tail tapered to the fineness of a whip. We measured it, and found it was 6 feet 2 inches in length.

"We'll pick this up when we return, and I'll try my hand at stuffing it. Keep your eye skinned, for goodness knows what we may bump up against, and watch out for snakes."

I reloaded and, now much more on the alert, we continued our journey.

A little farther on we came to a small break in the dense bush close alongside the stream, which was beautifully clear, and leaning over we watched many

strange fish swimming about in the clear water. I looked at it longingly.

"I should like a bathe," I said tentatively.

"Nothing doing!" replied Midge; "it reeks of crocodiles, and although you may not be able to see them they can see you. Ah!" he went on, dropping his voice, "look over there!"

I looked but could see nothing.

"Have another look," he said, thoroughly enjoying himself at my expense.

Not too certain if he was pulling my leg, and being very thirsty I nonchalantly asked him to knock down a coco-nut.

"Can you really see nothing?"

Furious that I could not, and unwilling to commit myself, I shook my head.

"Good Lord! you must be blind—there—there—mixed up with that tangled mass of vines."

In the exact spot where I had been gazing I saw a quiver—then the outline of a snake so closely assimilated to the foliage and vine stems that I believe I should have walked into it had I been alone.

"Shoot!" he whispered, "the rifle's no use."

I fired and the snake fell slithering with a splash into the stream.

"That was a deadly bushmaster," said Midge, "it must have been quite seven feet long."

How I hate snakes! There is something so repulsive about them. Snakes and rats are my two pet aversions.

This place was like a Zoological Garden. A few minutes after we had despatched the bushmaster we killed another curious animal, an ant-eater—a grotesque monstrosity, with long rubber-like snout and stout steel claws. Provided by Nature with enormous strength in its short legs and claws, the ant-eater tears up ants' nests in the ground and then thrusts in its long snout and feeds on them.

We saw several more iguanos and heard many rustlings through the bush. The going through the dense undergrowth was very heavy and the heat awful. When we sat down to rest I was parched with thirst, and the river tantalisingly alongside seemed to make it worse, but I could not see how we were going to take advantage of the clear water close at hand. The bank above the river without shelving dropped steeply down from the side.

"Lie flat," advised Midge, "bend over, and I'll hold your legs; then you can put your face in."

I managed easily to get a drink like this, after which I helped him to do the same.

We rested for about ten minutes and were about to make a move when I got another shock. Midge suddenly clapped his hand over my mouth—not too gently—almost knocking me backwards. Not a word did he say in explanation. Crash! went the rifle. An enormous burst of water rose into the air close to where we had been leaning over drinking.

"A damned great crocodile," he said. "I saw its head stealing out from under that bush. Jolly place, isn't it?"

"Very!" I answered feebly, feeling rather like a doll without any sawdust.

When the turmoil in the water had subsided I could see a horrible-looking brute lying on the bottom, still feebly moving its tail.

The excitement of the last few hours had dispelled any sense of terror, and I was only conscious of an overwhelming fatigue.

"I think we'd better go back," I suggested, "I've had enough for one day."

"Yes, but what a hunting ground!" said Midge regretfully. "Imagine what it would be like at night with a spot-light!"

I could imagine it, but did not feel enthusiastic. I

was as yet a neophyte in the mystery of the wilds. My feminine instincts still clashed with the insistent surge of the primitive. I had not realised the utter savagery of the primeval jungle—the extraordinary creatures that infested it—roaming, hunting, fighting among themselves, undisturbed by that greatest of all disturbers—man.

On our way back to the beach a feeling of depression settled on me, and I was very relieved when we came into the open by the sea.

“ This has been easy going,” remarked Midge, “ we had the stream as a guide ; but think what it would be with no mark at all, if you were obliged to go through miles of country hacking a trail as you went. We can understand better now what men like Stanley and Livingstone were up against. Not one person in a thousand when they read of how they went into darkest Africa can visualise their hardships and sufferings or the immense difficulties they must have encountered.”

The time had passed rapidly, and it was quite late in the afternoon before we arrived at the place where Robbie, who was getting very worried about us, was waiting by the fire.

He got us some green coco-nuts, and, returning to the *Cara*, I flopped down on to my bunk aching in every limb, drunk with sleep ; but the heat was unbearable, the night deadly still, and, owing to the fact that we were anchored so near the shore, we were the centre of attraction to a host of mosquitoes. They swarmed round us, making the incessant trumpeting hum which bitter experience has taught me to look on as the most horrible sound in the world. I tried to creep under my net, but each time I lowered it, in spite of every effort to drive them away beforehand, hundreds seemed to have got there first—it was useless. Muffled curses from the cock-pit told me I was not the only one being eaten alive. Had it been possible I think we would have risked the open

sea in spite of the darkness, but to attempt to creep through the narrow break in the reef before daylight was out of the question.

I spent the night without closing an eye, finally in desperation attempting to drive them away with a towel, for had the swarms settled on me an attack of malaria would have been the certain result. I was never more pleased than to see the first flush of dawn steal into the sky.

We wasted no time, but got under way and made out to sea, away from that spot of evil memories.

Heading east-north-east we had not been running long before up came the wind, and it was only a few minutes before the sea began to break over us, the boat performing a sort of corkscrew dive between each roller.

About twelve miles ahead we could see a couple of islands for which we steered, and arriving there found that to anchor presented another difficulty. There were reefs nearly all round, but we managed to creep inside, while cayucas filled with Indians at once put off. We were too worn out to take an interest in anything except food and sleep, and it was not until the sun was dipping that we had the energy to rouse ourselves.

The wind had entirely died away and there was every prospect of a peaceful night, but shortly afterwards we realised that the calm was no criterion of what was to come, for at about 7 p.m. another night of horrors commenced.

I noticed we had drifted a little and mentioned the fact. The wind had got up again and was steadily increasing, and with it the roll coming in through the reef. It was plain we were in danger of grounding on the island. Midge decided we must work in closer to the reef by hook or by crook. The darkness was intense. We had an anchor out fore and aft, and it was the anchor off the bow that was dragging. There

was only one thing to do, but in the darkness it was terribly difficult, for by now a young gale was blowing, the roar of the surf deafening, and the whole situation nerve-racking.

Midge took the wheel with Robbie standing by the engine. As our propeller commenced to revolve a shout from the native aft told us the worst. He had unfastened the stern anchor rope from the capstan and had let it slip from his hands, so that we were now without the anchor and line, and the position was desperate.

Slowly manœuvring the yacht so that its bow was almost touching the reef ahead we got a firm grip with our bow anchor, and taking one of the shark lines, doubling it fourfold, we attached it to a spare anchor we carried, and got that out astern.

It was a terrible night—again no sleep. At 5 a.m. the wind commenced to decrease in force, and by the time it was fairly light had died away altogether. Our native, who seemed to be as much at home in the water as on land, now dived down and recovered the gear we had lost in the night, which was a great source of comfort, for I realised we had to be prepared for every emergency in these waters. The Indians had put off again in their cayucas, and we sent a message that we would come ashore and visit the Chief.

The village was built in a clearing towards the centre of the island and was entirely surrounded by palm trees. The first objects that caught the eye were ten wooden gods lined up in a row alongside the track through the trees which led to the thatched dwellings.

We subsequently discovered that there were five other groups of these gods, and it was explained to us later on that they were placed around to keep away the evil spirits. We were told afterwards that this island was called Maragandee.

The Indians showed the greatest pleasure at our visit,

making us presents of big bunches of plantains, pine-apples, and avocardo pears.

As usual they had itch very badly, as well as other complaints. And here again we found albinos.

They all seemed very sad when we left, but our visit had to be in the nature of a flying one, as we had much to do before we could reach our destination.

I wish I could give an adequate description of our journey from here to the next island, which was called Oocoopsenekee. Although it only took two hours and forty minutes it seemed an eternity. The rollers at times were 20 feet high, and I never thought our little ship would make the passage. When nearing the island she gave a horrible lurch, which flung Midge from the wheel to the rail. I did my best to relieve him, but could see by his face that he was in great pain. He had struck the rail with sickening force and I was afraid some bones were broken ; but fortunately he was only badly bruised.

That night we anchored under the lee of a little island and, thank goodness, spent the hours till daylight in peace.

The further we penetrated into the San Blas the more primitive became the people, and the more inclined were they to consider us supernatural.

We were interested in watching the pulling down of one of their houses on this island. It was a very rapid proceeding, in which all the male population seemed to take part, the operations being apparently directed by the women. The roof thatch had partially come down when all of them became very excited. We were at a loss to understand why. Running rapidly to their fires they returned with burning brands, and for some incomprehensible reason set fire to the whole lot.

" They've suddenly gone mad," I said.

" There must be some explanation," Midge answered.

Before he had time to enquire I could see amidst the

flames the twirling bodies of a couple of snakes, and later learnt that the thatched roof had harboured a nest of these deadly creatures, which are held in the utmost dread by the Indians.

The life on this island was a most interesting study. The women seemed to have an astonishing number of children. The beaded anklets which they wore were works of art. They were 6 inches deep and so tight that it almost seemed as if they must stop the circulation. Just above them a narrower one was worn, the flesh bulging over, and yet another below the knee. It must be these anklets that make the women walk so badly. Their legs are very thin, and they all wander along with their toes turned in. The flesh all seems to go to their stomachs, which are huge—they look top-heavy, their stomachs and breasts merged into one.

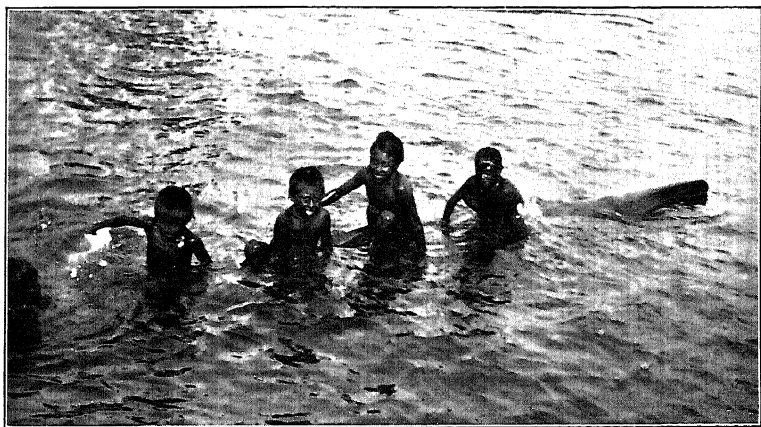
Their arms were covered in bracelets fashioned in the same way as the anklets on the legs.

Some small boys fishing gave me an object lesson on how to catch fish easily and yet in a most primitive fashion. They had half a coco-nut shell full of tiny fry, which were thrown into the sea by one of them, while the others stood with wooden spears upraised, the heads of which consisted of five prongs of black palm, very sharp, and barbed like fish hooks. The instant a large fish dashed in to feed on the bait that had been thrown, the boys hurled their spears beneath the surface with wonderful accuracy, and were successful in transfixing a fish four times out of six. They had a pile of quite thirty or forty jack, parrot fish, and red snappers on the beach beside them. No doubt they were catching sufficient to supply the whole village.

We stayed at Oocoopsenekee that night and determined to explore the following day a river on the mainland which empties itself into the sea about three miles off, the entrance to which could be plainly seen from the yacht.



WE VISIT TWO SAN BLAS ISLETS WITH ONLY THREE FAMILIES ON EACH (p. 86).



INDIAN DUG-OUT TURNING TURTLE (p. 94).

On leaving, we were presented with some wonderful necklaces, mostly made of brilliant seeds, with the exception of two, which were cunningly fashioned of tiny sea shells.

As we continued our journey it grew much hotter, especially at night. The river called me, which, owing to my sticky state, will be readily understood.

CHAPTER X

WE EXPLORE AN UNCHARTED RIVER—ALLEGANDEE, THE STRONGHOLD OF THE SAN BLAS INDIANS

WE rose early and, starting the engine, ran the yacht close in to the mouth of the river, after which, getting into the dinghy, with Robbie at the oars, we rowed up this uncharted stream. It was thrilling to realise that we were the first white people that had ever penetrated here, and there was always the excitement of not knowing what lay before us.

The scenery was glorious. The river broadened in places, though as we got farther from the mouth every now and again it shallowed abruptly, forcing us to get out, wade, and practically lift the little boat over the beds of rounded stones where the water gurgled only a few inches deep. With equal suddenness it dropped into dark green depths, with ever a sense of mystery, giving me an awed feeling as I conjured up visions of what might lurk in the unfathomable waters.

Previous experience in penetrating the unknown had taught me to keep an ever wary eye when trees or vines overhung the river, and every time I heard a crackling noise in the dense undergrowth on either side my hand involuntarily tightened on my rifle.

Three lizards ran ahead of us from one bank to the other, skimming the water with so rapid a motion that they hardly touched the surface, and shortly after this there came a crash—instinctively my rifle came to my shoulder—it was only a large coco-nut which had fallen from overhead into the river. The most marvellous

butterflies were flitting backwards and forwards, and it would be impossible for me to depict the plumage of most of the birds.

We must have rowed for six miles before the river divided, and choosing the stream to the left we had not gone more than 500 yards farther when we arrived at a beautiful stretch, the water flowing brilliantly clear at an average depth of 3 feet over a silver sandy bottom. Pulling the dinghy to the side, we fastened it up to the giant grasses which drooped low down from the bank, and prepared to luxuriate in the bathe to which I had been looking forward for days with such eager anticipation.

We were both in bathing costumes.

"Now," I said, "we will enjoy ourselves."

"Not me!" he answered, regardless of grammar; "I'm going to stop here with the rifle while you have your swim, and you can do the same for me afterwards. Everything looks all right, but I don't like the smell."

"I've noticed something funny too," I replied, "a strange, fusty odour."

"That's why I intend to stand by with the rifle," he answered, "the stench is unmistakable—it's crocodiles or alligators; a hole must be somewhere very near."

I had perhaps better explain that the crocodile's retreat as a rule is a cavernous hole beneath the water in the muddy side of a stream or lake, and the moment it catches its prey it retires to its home to consume it at leisure. In the dry season waters which are normally deep become shallow, when this hole is exposed and the sickening odour I have mentioned pervades the atmosphere for a considerable distance.

I speedily found there were other troubles besides these repulsive reptiles. I had no sooner taken off the overall which covered my bathing dress than I was attacked on the shoulders by myriads of mosquitoes, and had anybody been watching they would have

laughed to see me immersed to the neck, perpetually flourishing my arms to prevent them attacking my face. However, I got my bathe, and then took the rifle to stand guard while Midge followed suit, but his attempt was very perfunctory ; he seemed to lack my enthusiasm. Strange how men seem to dislike water even from their infancy !

There was no need to row back ; owing to the current it was only necessary to steer the boat, but we suddenly received a most unpleasant shock which might easily have led to a tragedy. We were all so absorbed in our surroundings that we were taking very little notice where we were going as long as we were fairly well out in the river. A violent jolt threw us all to one side of the dinghy, which immediately capsized, with the result that three very much surprised people were thrown into the water. When our heads bobbed above the surface, spluttering and gasping, our first thought was to investigate the cause of the trouble. I thought we had probably been upset by running on the back of a dozing crocodile, but was thankful to see it was only the partially submerged rounded branch of a tree.

The air round Midge was very sultry. That man has a wonderful flow of language when he forgets himself—in fact, I've known him continue for three minutes without a pause or repeating himself, before he caught my eye, but I must say that always did the trick—one must have some hold over these rough explorer men !

"What's the matter ?" I gasped in as shocked a voice as I could command (my eye being not available). The only reply was a fresh explosion of words he had previously forgotten.

We worked the dinghy to the bank and emptied it, when his laconic "Gun ! rifle !" made me realise he had good reason for his wrath. I looked at him blankly, for when the dinghy had turned turtle both our weapons had gone to the bottom of the river.

We got into the boat and paddled to the tree trunk that had caused all the trouble. Holding on to this we looked over the side and could distinctly see both gun and rifle lying on the gravelly bed.

"Well!" said Midge, "there's only one way we can get them, and that's by diving."

This he did three times, his temper becoming worse as the current baffled him at each attempt. Then Robbie, who, like most natives, seems to be semi-aquatic, saved the situation by swimming a little above before diving down.

One really conceives quite an affection for a gun after a little while, so many memories are associated with it. Feeling chastened and corrected for our carelessness we returned to the yacht without further incident and continued our journey early next day.

After leaving this anchorage the heat was unendurable; it was agony to touch any metal, but the sea was much calmer. We had gone about twenty miles when we stopped to visit two small islets. They were quite tiny, with only three families of Indians on each; but a short distance beyond there was a big island with a large village.

The deeper we made our way into the San Blas and the more primitive the people became, the more complicated and wonderful became the anklets and beaded armlets of the women, as well as their curious figured cloth. Both men and women, strangely enough, also seemed to differ slightly in figure from the Indians on the outskirts. Their toes were more turned in and their legs thinner. The men had a greater breadth of shoulder, while all the flesh of the women, as at Oocoo-senekee, seemed to go to their stomachs, which were huge, accentuating their top-heavy appearance.

We had our usual welcome, and as we sat on the yacht four dug-outs filled with little boys came close to us and gave an exhibition of swimming and diving

which was a revelation to me. They seemed as much at home in the water as were the fish, and performed almost incredible feats in water so deep that no white man could possibly dive to the bottom. This game developed into a kind of competition. Half a dozen would throw a heavy stone simultaneously while they plunged in as one from their dug-outs. We could watch them through the clear water propelling themselves perpendicularly downwards. That they reached the bottom was a certainty, for each rose with one of the stones they had thrown in, the boy reaching the dug-out first being the victor. Every time they dived their little crafts turned turtle, but this was of no consequence, for in less than a minute they had thrown the water out by rocking the dug-out violently from side to side and climbed back again.

A surprising thing was the ease with which the women bore their children. I became very much interested in a tiny mite only a day old, though for all the mother was affected it might easily have been three months, as she was walking about as usual, the birth of a child apparently not causing her as much trouble as a cut finger.

As yet I had not noticed the slightest sign of affection between the sexes. Indeed, so far I had not seen affection in any form. Life, death, or sickness seemed to leave them equally unmoved—to the outward eye at all events. From my own observation I think this was not a pose, and that they were really incapable of any of the finer feelings as we know them.

We learnt from the Indians on this island that the great stronghold of the San Blas—one might almost call it their metropolis, by name Allegandee, was only eighteen miles away ; but it was apparently very difficult to get there. By words and signs they gave us to understand they doubted whether the yacht would be able to traverse a certain channel which led into the main ocean. However, we had gone through so much

that not the slightest thought of turning back crossed our minds.

The first part of our journey was the easiest we had yet had, as we cut through at full speed a placid surface behind some small low islands that stretched away from the larger one we had just left. We soon neared what appeared to be a *cul de sac*, slowed down, and could then see a break in the reef. On arriving at the entrance (it was certainly not more than 20 yards) the mighty rollers racing in from without seemed to press into the narrow channel and rush through with awful force, while close on either side as they boomed on the reef they rose 30 feet in the air. It seemed impossible that we could ever make the main sea, but somehow it was accomplished. The memory of this passage still sometimes haunts me at night.

On gaining the ocean, we had to encounter worse seas; coral reefs and rocky pinnacles strewed our passage. Many times it seemed as if nothing could save us from being dashed to pieces, though the great breakers in many cases were really a help, as when they curled and burst over rock and reef, they gave a far better warning of these death-traps than a bell buoy would have done, and thus enabled us to give them a wide berth. Navigation was an awful strain on the nerves. Midge's face was set in a sphinx-like mask; one is little inclined for speech when great dangers threaten.

Finally we ran behind a long flat sand-bank, and after passing it Allegandee lay straight ahead.

Drawing nearer we could see through glasses a vast crowd of Indians lining the shore, and when we were about a mile away their roar of excitement rolled across the intervening space. We approached from the ocean side and had to pass almost completely round before dropping anchor between the island and the mainland. We travelled close to the shore, the Indians running in

the shallow water at the edge of the island as we proceeded, and on our anchoring a short distance from the beach about 50 cayucas or more, filled with Indians, put off to welcome us.

The island as seen from the boat appeared to be one mass of thatched dwellings ; so tightly were they packed there was no room for even a coco-nut palm to grow. Towards the mainland stretched a broad, open, triangle-shaped lagoon, narrowing as it cut like a wedge into the land. We could see numbers of cayucas coming out towards us as hard as they could paddle from what was obviously a river. It was a wonderful sight. Dug-out after dug-out was laden, until almost flush with the water, with huge bunches of plantains and bananas ; others were piled high with giant calabashes in which water was being carried from the mainland to the island, these canoes being " manned " only by women. There were also several boats with Indian men armed with bows, barbed arrows, and long fish spears, the fish lying in the bottom being a tribute to their skill in their simple, primitive method of hunting, which is by shooting with bow and arrow, or by spearing, for they have no such things as lines and hooks.

Close to the shore, some distance from us, what looked like a pier jutted out, made of crooked, misshapen piles stuck higgledy-piggledy down into the water ; and on the top of them long strips of wood were fastened to allow walking.

A number of Indians were fishing, all with spears, and every now and again was seen the downward plunge of a spear, followed by the flash of sun on the scales of the fish that had been impaled.

The flotilla of cayucas which had put off from the shore to welcome us had now been augmented by many more. They remained stationary some yards from the boat, apparently waiting for something. Threading its



DUG-OUT "MANNED" BY WOMEN (p. 96).



DUG-OUTS COMING OUT OF THE RIVER (p. 96).

way through them a dug-out larger than the rest approached. Standing up in the bow, balancing himself perfectly, stood an abnormally broad-shouldered San Blas Indian holding a queer stick in his hand. On reaching the yacht he raised this stick and saluted us.

"Nueddee Sagala Tumati!" was his greeting. We replied.

He came on board the yacht with three others. We were given to understand that the Chief of all the San Blas Indians, San Coman, having heard we were coming, was waiting to receive us.

"I'm damned if I'm going," groaned Midge. "I'm starving, it's late, and after the awful piece of water we've just come through I've had about enough. A pow-wow would mean hours in a smelly hut, stinking like nothing on earth."

Worn out physically and mentally, I heartily agreed.

The usual talk took place, and while this was going on I was able to take stock of the Indians. Nearly all had their cheeks very much reddened, and the black streak down the nose, and all without exception wore the funny little straw hat perched on the top of the head. As the jabbering and gesticulating continued I noticed the eyes of the head-men continually wandering in the direction of Midge's rifle, which was resting against the cabin top. At last their curiosity could no longer be contained; one braver than the rest went over, raised it gingerly, and started to look down the barrel. Midge snatched it from him, for it was fully loaded, and tried to explain what its uses were, but unsuccessfully.

"I can't make him understand," he said; "I'll use it and let them see for themselves."

Calling Robbie he told him to take an empty petrol tin in the dinghy and row off with it until motioned to stop, the Indians meantime looking on with mild surprise, not having the faintest notion what was coming. When about a hundred yards off we signalled, and the

tin was put into the water. Midge sighted the rifle and fired three shots in rapid succession.

The Indians simply collapsed on the deck, too staggered to utter a sound, while the rest of the dug-outs paddled off precipitately in wild flight. When the head-men on the yacht had recovered sufficiently to look for the tin it had sunk, water having poured in through the holes made by the bullets.

Midge then tried to get one of the Indians to take the rifle and fire it himself, but nothing on earth would induce any of them to touch it.

At last we got them to come close up while we did our best to explain the meaning of the miraculous exhibition, but it was no good—they were as mystified as ever ; so the simplest way of reassuring them was to tell them that it was reserved for the destruction of evil spirits—therefore they need not fear it. But by their agitation it was evident that they expected the awful roar to break out again any moment.

After we had made them some small present, not forgetting to send one to the Chief, they departed, and we promised to come ashore early in the morning.

CHAPTER XI

THE GREAT MEETING AT ALLEGANDEE—OUR LIFE AMONG THE INDIANS

THERE was no need for anyone to call me the next day, for at sun-rise the yacht was again completely surrounded by dozens of dug-outs. As soon as they saw we were up and on deck, the four head-men came on board, bringing presents in return. These consisted of a very fine stick from the Chief, necklaces and various other articles from the head-men. As soon as possible we went ashore. An enormous crowd was awaiting the arrival of the dinghy, but they fell back leaving a passage through what was apparently the only opening between the solid phalanx of dwellings.

The Chief's house was built almost in the centre of the island, with a large open space close by, which it was impossible to see until we reached it. The houses were much larger than those on the other islands we had visited.

I was wearing my breeches and boots (for fear of picking up "live-stock") and Midge was dressed in the same way.

The Chief's house was an imposing structure, at least 250 feet in length by 60 feet in height, constructed—as were all the San Blas dwellings—of stout bamboo sides and supports, with a thatched roof of coco-nut palm branches.

On entering I got a shock. The building was densely packed with Indians—hundreds must have been crowded into it, and the heat was awful. San Coman reposed

in a remarkable hammock in the centre, the head-men sitting on flat oblong blocks of wood that looked as hard as iron. Two had been placed for us exactly facing him, and on these we sat. There was utter silence. One could have heard a pin drop. I expected to hear a conversation start any moment, but nothing happened. Minutes passed. I found it terribly trying to the nerves—yet not a sound broke the stillness. Had this large concourse of people been wooden images they could not have been more inanimate. Time went on; I stole a glance at Midge, but could see not the slightest expression on his face, so, realising that there must be some reason for it all, I tried to make my face equally expressionless. If only someone had sneezed or coughed it would have relieved the tension. There they stood, with no movement of the body, seeming not even to breathe.

At least an hour elapsed before the Chief spoke the one word which, although uttered very quietly, made me jump. A deadly silence fell again, and some minutes elapsed before Midge replied with the same word in an equally soft voice. The ice was broken and conversation started.

A sort of presentation ceremony then took place, man after man standing before Midge and slowly greeting him, while the women, who had now been admitted from outside, passed through in between the crowd of men, and came up to me, the first being the Chief's wife, who held with one arm a strange-looking god. It was fashioned of wood, and an exact duplicate of themselves, even to the dress. In the other arm she carried her week-old baby which she laid on my knee. I stroked the little thing's hand, and when she picked it up her place was taken by other women in turn, each carrying a child, which they solemnly deposited in my lap in the same manner as the Chief's wife.

Hour after hour went by like this until I thought it

was never going to end, but at last the ordeal was over. Perspiration was pouring down me, the heat now the sun was high in the heavens, coupled with the steaming mass of humanity inside the building making breathing difficult, but I knew it was imperative for us to see the thing through, so stuck it out. There was no alternative.

Following this ceremony conversation again started, and the Chief appeared to me to be quite an intelligent man. Among other things, he told us that their gods had ordered them not to change their mode of dress, or do away with their anklets and nose-rings.

He was very anxious to know whether the land from which we came had got a name—did a great spirit dwell there, and who were we? Midge did his best to answer these questions, telling him that the name of the land was England, where there was a great white Chief who was called a King.

The Indian mind is very curious, seeming to confuse the spiritual with the material, for he then asked whether we had beautiful villages such as they had. It was difficult to keep a straight face, but we did our best to satisfy their curiosity. His next query was a poser. Were we the children of the King? I hope our reply will not be considered *lèse-majesté*, for there was nothing for us to do but claim the greatness thrust upon us!

The Chief then enquired about our great god's medicine. Here again we experienced difficulty in explaining how it was it could not cure everything instantly. Out came the ammonia bottle. Midge held it close under the Chief's nose, making him gasp and tears pour down his cheeks, which did more to convince them of the miraculous properties of our medicine than any talking could have done. However, one had to be prepared for surprises all the time. All the other Indians were suddenly seized with a desire to smell it, and a long and tedious business commenced; the more the fumes made

them choke and their eyes water, the more they seemed to like it. Time meant nothing to them; the whole day was spent like this. We had had breakfast at half-past six in the morning, and it was not until after six in the evening that we could leave the sweltering atmosphere of the dwelling, to be escorted back to the yacht with immense ceremony.

The Chief had told us that, as usual, disease was rampant among them, and we promised to come ashore in the morning and doctor them, as we had done on the other islands.

It is easy to understand why they nearly all suffered from something or another. It is only necessary to picture thousands of people crowded together on an island of a few acres. As soon as a case of infectious sickness occurs, it naturally becomes epidemic.

It was a real pleasure for me to do what I could to help them—they were so pathetic and childlike in their simplicity.

Now began days of real hard work doctoring men, women, and children for every conceivable complaint. Tuberculosis was very bad among them, and of course the inevitable hookworm and the frightful itch we had seen on the other islands. They also had one complaint which I had not met before. Their name for it, literally translated, was "hot belly." Following the announcement of this trouble the sufferers proceeded to divest themselves of all their clothing, imagining, I suppose, that we could see by the stomach what was the matter. It was embarrassing at first, but it happened so often that I had perforce to get used to it, and tried to imagine I was a real doctor and that it was all in the day's work.

I could not understand why no babies were born while we were there, and the explanation is rather extraordinary. As far as we were able to discover, a birth is forbidden on the island. As the time for the event

approaches, the woman goes to the mainland in a dug-out and bears her child quite alone in the bush, returning with it a few hours later. This custom prevails throughout the San Blas islands.

While we were doctoring the people we found several old men and women who desired to be made young again. A little difficult to accomplish, but it paled into insignificance before what took place later when we penetrated inland.

It was not at all pleasant when I went on my rounds doctoring, for the smell in many of the houses was appalling, forcing me to smoke the whole time, while the floor underfoot was quite sodden.

On the second afternoon, about 3 o'clock, while we were busy with our medicine chest, we noticed the Indians engaged in voluble conversation among themselves. Without warning the sun disappeared and everything was at once enveloped in gloom. It was evident the people were expecting something out of the ordinary to occur.

Threading our way through the houses to the edge of the sea and looking towards the north-east, one did not need to be a weather prophet to know that a heavy storm or hurricane was fast approaching. And, what was more disturbing, as far as I could see we lay right in its track. A vivid white line stretched unbroken away out to sea, accentuated against the blue-black background of the storm, the curling white being caused by the heavy wind driving the sea scud before it.

Words were needless—we hastened as hard as we could to the beach where our dinghy lay, and as soon as we reached the yacht got out a second anchor. Not more than ten minutes had elapsed between our first sight of the rapidly approaching menace and our getting on board, and the second anchor was hardly down when the storm burst in all its fury.

My first thought was for the safety of the numbers of cayucas we could see paddling their hardest from the river mouth on the mainland to their island home. The rain storm which would inevitably follow this blast had not yet begun. Peeping out between the canvas I saw their little dug-outs stagger under the shock when the full force of the gale struck them and the girls commence to bail frantically as the wind-lashed water swept over them, but though they paddled and bailed as hard as they could, they made no headway. In unison, and as if at a given signal, all the boats seemed to know what to do. It was a remarkable exhibition of seamanship. Every canoe's nose edged so that the force of the wind and water would strike slightly on the bow as they crept closer and closer to the shore. I was working myself up into a fever of worry about the poor things, but Midge kept telling me they were used to it, and that a capsized boat was an everyday occurrence with them. Still, I could not but be anxious, and watched every mark on the mainland, feeling inclined to call out "Bravo!" as they passed and left it behind.

The wind increased in fury and then they had to turn in the same way that a sailing vessel tacks. This was successfully accomplished by all but one cayuca, which contained more women than the rest; there were six of them, and their combined weight brought the gunwale down to within a few inches of the water. A wave broke over them, followed by another, and before their frantic bailing could avail anything, subsequent waves completely engulfed it, and over it went at the same time turning turtle, the women all being flung into the sea. So adept, however, were they that not one of their heads disappeared below the surface. As the boat capsized they seemed to go with it and held on, never letting go for an instant, rocking it violently and throwing out the water.

I watched them fascinated. While five of the women

held it comparatively steady one climbed in and immediately began bailing with a large half calabash, two more then followed suit and commenced to paddle, the three remaining in the water swimming and alternately pushing the boat ahead and holding on to rest, and in this fashion they passed close to the yacht, smiling quite happily at me.

One by one the cayucas made the island, the last beaching just as a wall of water descended, when all observation was cut short, a roar of rain thundering down through which one could only see a few yards.

Our anchors had held and we had not budged an inch. As usual in this part of the world, the chuquesana departed as quickly as it had rushed on us, scurrying inland to break up on the mountainous range, leaving white woolly masses of vapour, which first settled on the crests and afterwards slowly sank down and down to the valleys.

A few minutes later the sun burst out and, nothing daunted, the cayucas put off from the shore to go up the river again.

They had all seen me watching their efforts to reach the island in the height of the storm, and instinctively, I am sure, knew how anxious I had been for them. Now, as they went by, the little girls and women smiled and said "Mammie." It was surprising how quickly they picked up this word. I had first taught it to a couple of children on the island, and in twenty-four hours that simple word was known to nearly all the women and children.

When they returned in the evening it was pathetic to see how each cayuca, as it came close to us, stopped and gave us a small present, first one holding up a mangoe, another avocardo pears, and so on. I gave them in return pieces of chocolate, of which we had brought a large quantity in cakes. They had never seen or tasted it before, and there is no doubt they thought

it wonderful, for presently a boat put off from the island bringing me thirteen of the finest mangoes I have ever eaten, for which, as I dare say they had hoped, they received another piece of chocolate.

"You are laying up trouble for yourself," said Midge.

"What's the matter?" I asked, surprised.

"Wait till to-morrow morning," he chuckled, and left it at that.

As soon as daylight broke I knew his words had been prophetic, for we were surrounded by a crowd of dug-outs, all filled with women and children. I suppose they had vested the small cakes of chocolate with miraculous powers as they had our medicine.

The yacht presently looked like Covent Garden Market. Besides mangoes and avocardo pears there were masses of pine-apples and a variety of other fruits. I was overwhelmed.

"What can we do with it all?" I asked in desperation. "We've enough here for a lifetime."

"I told you so!" was his unpardonable reply. If there is anything in this world that annoys a woman it is to have that remark hurled at her.

"How am I going to tell them without hurting their feelings that we've got more than enough?"

"No good; don't try," was his helpful answer.

Force majeure, I didn't, and the result was that so much fruit was brought on board that we were obliged surreptitiously, under cover of darkness, to let the sea hide the accumulative surplus.

We spent some days here, and were able to gain much remarkable information about the strange tribe that inhabited the mainland in a ring or defined area which no other person but themselves was allowed to enter. This was the "word of the gods," which could under no circumstances be disobeyed. For it must be realised that in this part of the world everything that takes place is at the command or will of the great spirits.



ISLAND OF SAGANDEE, SAN BLAS (p. 107).



AUTHOR ON ISLAND OF OOSTOPO (p. 107).

Time was pressing and we had to continue our journey, followed by many signs of regret from the people.

The scenery was like fairy-land. Wonderful tiny islands, some with only one lone coco-nut tree in the centre, dotted the sea, while coral reefs unsuspectingly cropped up everywhere. The rollers breaking on these reefs are a picture ; a remarkable aquamarine tint first shows through the curling wave, then a mass of white spray thrown high into the air like smoke. And the coast scenery—was ever anything like it anywhere ? All greens from the palest shades to the deepest, the Reckitt's blue of the mountains turning to royal, then purple, until where they stretched in the distance the colour resembled the bloom on a plum. It was all so perfect that it will ever be stamped on my memory, mysterious, and wonderful.

Our first port of call was at a place called Sagandee. This boasted only twenty-seven houses.

The next was Quedee, where again there was only a small colony of Indians. We then went on until we reached Oostoopo, where we found an extraordinarily fine natural harbour.

Turning in towards the mainland from the outer sea it was just as if we were driving straight on to the mainland, but passing through a channel we discovered it was an island separated from the isthmus by about half a mile of deep still water. As usual, it was overcrowded with houses and people.

From a distance the Indian huts always looked like hay-fields when the crop is stacked.

On landing we found there were two Chiefs who had divided the people of the island between them, not the slightest sign of any antagonism or jealousy existing. In fact, all through the San Blas we discovered no traces of petty spite one towards the other.

Leaving Oostoopo, we passed two more settlements, beyond which was another mighty San Blas stronghold

called Sasardi, presided over by Chief Eneepebegenia. We went through the usual formula and learned some interesting things. One was that the Indians still asserted that they were in Colombia, whereas, of course, they were actually in Panama. They steadfastly maintained that it was their own territory, and would acknowledge no other Republic's right within the Chief's sphere of influence. If ever hostilities broke out, it would surely be a very costly operation for the country concerned.

At Sasardi we heard more about the unknown tribe in the interior, and it was evident that communication existed between the San Blas and these people, though all seemed wrapped in a certain amount of mystery, as we always found them chary of discussing the matter.

There is no doubt that the people inland were looked upon with fear. When we mooted the subject of going up to visit them they gazed on us with amazement, but appeared to take it for granted that with us all things were possible. We were told one thing definitely—that no San Blas Indians were allowed within the rigidly guarded area inland, and that only a favoured few of the Chucunaque, by which name they were known, on rare occasions came down to Sasardi to trade.

We made up our minds to return to Allegandee, and had a great send-off. On our way we called once more at Oostoopo. Our former visit had unquestionably been discussed during our absence, for on arriving we had a remarkable reception, the Indians being drawn up in lines, and as we landed every hand shot into the air, while a roar of welcome rang out.

After paying our respects we continued on our way to see the great Chief, San Coman, once more having to thread that nerve-racking, interminable maze of reefs before running into the placid stillness adjacent to Allegandee.

On arrival we found the Indians drawn up in lines,

as at Oostopo, but we could get no nearer a solution of how to penetrate the interior. It was quite evident that the San Blas Indians dared not come with us. I could not help doubting if they knew the way themselves.

That evening, when we were talking the matter over, Midge expressed the determination that, come what might, he would make the attempt.

"I won't admit defeat at this stage of the game," he said; "after all we've gone through."

I will pass over the arguments we had on this subject, but I was equally determined.

"All right," he said finally, "let's leave to-morrow."

However, the unexpected always happens.

The following morning it became evident that events of the greatest importance were taking place on the island. It is difficult to describe how we knew it, except to say that there seemed to be a suppressed excitement among the Indians who, as usual, surrounded us in their dug-outs, and also among the crowds assembled on the shore.

The dug-out with the head-men shortly came alongside, and they at once informed us that a great meeting was again being held in the Chief's dwelling. Usually so stoical, they seemed strangely perturbed. Quite without knowing it they let a word slip which gave a hint as to what had taken place. Midge immediately seized on it. He looked at them and said:

"Have the Chucunaque arrived?"

Their astonishment was ludicrous.

Making a lucky shot he added: "We returned here because we knew they were coming to guide us to their country."

The head-men gazed on us with fresh amazement. We were, indeed, mighty spirits, for how could any mortal know the exact time these people were coming from the interior?

The story circulated rapidly and added immensely to the awe with which we were regarded.

We went ashore, and saw half a dozen strange-looking Indians, when we had another example of the way news travels among primitive tribes. There was just a bare possibility to account for the San Blas people knowing we were coming (i.e. by means of smoke), but in this case it was extremely unlikely, and yet the fact remains that here were the actual messengers from the mysterious tribe that dwelt inland.

It was the first time they had ever seen a white man or woman, and on our entering they were all seized with consternation, which increased still further when the head-men conveyed the information that we had actually come to Allegandee on purpose to meet them, having full knowledge that they were coming.

Our friend San Coman thereupon explained to us that news of the great healers and spirits having reached them, this tribe had sent representatives to bid us welcome and beg us to visit them, as they were in a terrible state of sickness.

It was in this unexpected way that we were given the key to unlock the door and prove the truth of much that we had heard.

One thing that surprised us was that their language seemed to be a dialect of the San Blas, and as we had now become fairly proficient in this really very simple tongue, they appeared to understand what we said when we addressed San Coman.

Midge commenced by explaining to them that we already knew of the meeting they had held, and that they wished us to visit them. He further staggered them by another of his lucky shots in the dark.

"Why was there a talk"—he asked them—"as to whether we should come or not? It had always been our intention, and we would have come even if they had not sent to invite us."

Telling them that we had to return to the boat to prepare certain secret medicines, we left without further ceremony.

When we got on board, the first thing Midge said to me was : " Now we're in for it ! I fancy what we've gone through will prove to be child's play compared with what is coming."

CHAPTER XII

AN INDIAN CHARON FERRIES US TO AN EQUALLY UNKNOWN GOAL—THE LAND OF MYSTERY—THE UNKNOWN CHUCUNAQUE

WE sat long that night discussing plans and making arrangements. Midge advised me to take the ridiculous long imitation pearl-ropes I have mentioned before, also some large glass earrings and one as big as a penny which formed a huge single-stone pendant. Guns and ammunition were, of course, a necessity. We burdened ourselves with as little food as possible, every article being an essential.

"I shan't require anything," said Midge, "except what I stand up in." He was in Bedford cord breeches and boots.

"But if you take my advice," he went on, "you will make a parcel of a thin white dress and stockings to wear when you put on all that regalia. A lightning change to create an effect may be very necessary, and I'm going to take some of the ship flares with me."

The latter at the time seemed a superfluous load, though I afterwards realised that they probably saved our lives, and of course we could not go without the most necessary adjunct of all—a medicine-chest packed to its utmost capacity.

I never slept a wink the whole night ; every time I lay back to doze the wildest fantasies chased one another in my brain. Midge did not sleep either, for I heard him prowling about several times, and at the

first streak of daylight found him sitting on deck carefully cleaning his automatic.

He greeted me with, " Everything is ready ; let's have a big breakfast and cram ourselves with as much food as we can eat, for it'll be a long time before we get another decent meal, else I'm much mistaken."

We impressed on Robbie that he was not to move the yacht under any circumstances from the place where we finally decided it should be anchored, until he heard from us again. Had we never returned, I really believe he would still be standing there, like Casabianca, his eyes fixed shorewards.

We had scarcely finished our morning meal when the Indians arrived to conduct us on our journey to the unknown.

Up to now we had not the slightest idea where our course lay, but as the Indians came alongside in their dug-outs we beckoned them to come on board. It was surprising how comparatively easily we understood what they said, though their speech was stilted and halting. It was difficult to rouse them from their mute state whenever they were confronted by us.

We discovered it would first of all be necessary for us to go up a river which is certainly not on any map, and which lay only a comparatively short distance from our present mooring. Calling Robbie we told him to tie their two dug-outs astern.

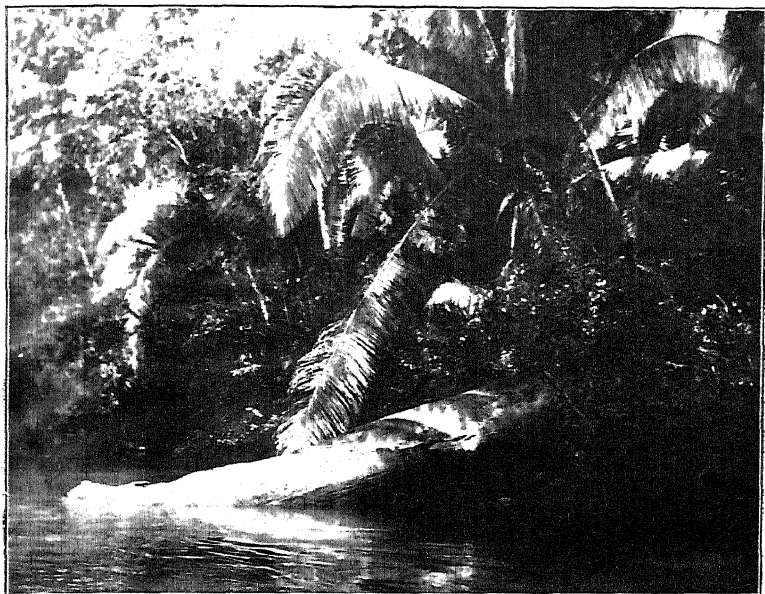
All the Indians of Allegandee were assembled on the shore to watch our departure. On this occasion—I don't know why—there was an indefinable something about their attitude which amounted to a doubt whether they would ever see us again. It is wonderful how acute one's instincts get in the wilds, but when I mentioned this feeling to Midge, he only laughed and said: " There you go again ! "

As soon as the engine started up I thought the Indians on the yacht would have jumped over the side—their

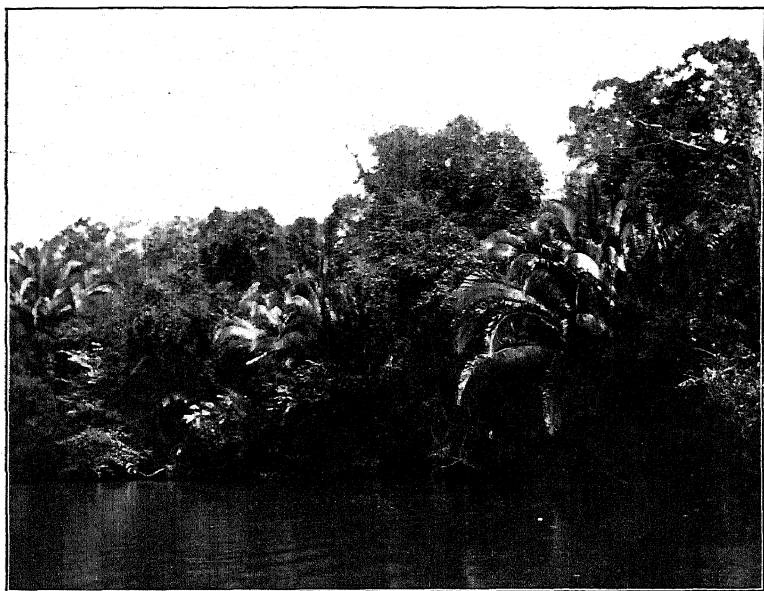
terror was pitiful. It was evident that no explanation of ours would make them understand how the boat could possibly be motor-driven, and I am certain it appeared as great a miracle to them as the story of the Israelites passing on dry land through the Red Sea does to us. By sheer domination Midge drove them below, then, throwing open the door which led from the main cabin to the engine-room, he gave them the full effect of the thudding. Their faces were a study when they came up on deck again. I believe they were convinced we were propelled through the water by the agency of some demon fiend that we held chained at our will. I foresaw the news of this incomprehensible manifestation spreading through the village would vest us with even greater power in their eyes.

A break appeared in the mangroves abutting the sea ; one of our guides silently pointed his finger towards it. We slowed down and as we drew closer saw a river, across the mouth of which, only a foot or two beneath the surface, a mud and sand bar had formed by the outrush of water from up-country during the rainy season, and bestrewn everywhere on this were gigantic trees, with roots complete. It was as if some giant had been at work tearing up and hurling the forest monarchs in a madness of wanton destruction. Only a dug-out or other tiny craft drawing a few inches of water could hope to pass this natural obstruction guarding the mouth.

We perforce hove to, and knew that our journey must now be continued in the dug-outs of our strange escorts. Owing to their very small size Midge and I were compelled to separate ; our supplies were likewise divided. Once safely ensconced we started, in each canoe an Indian performing a feat which Blondin might have envied, by balancing himself with legs astride on the edge of the gunwale. By the dexterous use of a long pole, rather like punting, we crossed the bar.



UNCHARTED RIVER LEADING TO CHUCUNAQUE (p. 116).



ANOTHER VIEW OF UNCHARTED RIVER (p. 116).

Our boats were not abreast, mine following exactly behind that in which Midge was seated, and I could not help feeling as if we were already departed spirits ferried by Charon to an equally unknown goal.

We threaded the maze of partially submerged tree trunks ; my dug-out then drew close alongside the other and we entered the mouth of the stream, passing almost at once into dimly green shade, for the sun was unable to penetrate the interlaced mangroves overhead. The water was very deep, the stench of decayed vegetation nauseating, while the mosquitoes surrounded us in clouds. Innumerable crabs crept in and out among the gnarled roots of the mangroves, to which I could just see below the surface of the water thousands of small oysters attached. Every now and again a heavy surging plunge told me as plainly as if I had seen it that an alligator had slithered from some hidden lair down beneath the water. It was a relief when we came into the vivid sunlight.

Words cannot describe the scenery and photographs can give only a slight conception of its beauty.

We paddled up the river about ten miles, when it commenced to shallow perceptibly, and we disembarked, following its course on foot a few miles farther, and then entered a narrow track which seemed to burrow its way through the dense foliage of the bush. The Indians went ahead, carrying the packages. We preferred to keep our guns, which gave us a sense of some protection. I shall never forget that walk. Unimpeded by the little clothing they wore, and used to it all their lives, it was nothing to them, but to us, clad in boots and breeches, it was a terrible ordeal. After only a few miles on foot our feet were so raw that a rest was imperative, though the pain afterwards seemed even worse. There was no help for it—we had to continue.

I knew by the sun's rays that we were well into the afternoon and I was parched with thirst, my lips dry

and cracked. We had to rest again, when I drank my fill of coco-nut water which was an absolute godsend, and after munching a cake of chocolate I felt better and managed to go on. Not long after this I noticed the track was rising, though, owing to the dense foliage, it was impossible to see whether we had at last arrived at the foot of the mountain range which we had seen from the shore. Presently the vegetation thinned somewhat, and we entered a gully between the hills, one side being almost precipitous while the other sloped gently. Our path here became much steeper. Come what might I knew it would be physically impossible for me to continue, and although Midge said nothing, I could see he was nearing the stage of exhaustion.

"We've got to stop," I managed to gasp, "I can't go any farther."

"My God!" he said, "I'd have given in long ago if you hadn't been with me."

It was a merciful relief to lie stretched out on the ground, which to my aching limbs seemed far more comfortable than my bed at home.

"No more to-day," said Midge, "here we stop. Apart from the impossibility of going on, I particularly want to arrive in the morning. To enter the village in the dark would take away largely from the effect we shall have on them."

When Midge told the Indians that we were going to remain there for the night they did not seem in the least surprised. I do not think half a dozen words had passed between them from the time we had left the yacht.

My night was uneventful; I fell asleep at once. No doubt the mosquitoes found this an excellent opportunity to feast on me, but utterly exhausted, I was blissfully unconscious even of them. Nothing disturbed my heavy sleep till sunrise, when I woke to find a fire well alight, with the tea already boiling in the billy, and this,

after corned beef and bananas, was an excellent start off for the day.

On resuming our journey, my feet were very painful and much swollen. Had I taken my boots off I should never have got them on again, and Midge was also limping. However, I was thankful to find that by taking it easier than the day before my sufferings were less.

The defile extended no great distance from where we had spent the night and finally led into a jungle which was impenetrable, except where we entered a trail that was really a tunnel through the vegetation. As the sun disappeared a ghostly virescent light took its place, and for the first time our guides showed animation. They walked warily, looking ceaselessly to right, left, and above them. Suddenly the leader, for no apparent reason, jumped back with an agility for which I had not given him credit, and the other three did the same as if by clock-work. They all stood stock-still. We followed their example. The leader then uttered one word—"Neipi" (snake). Their eyesight was remarkable. Neither of us could see anything. For several minutes they stood motionless. There is no question that there was a snake, and that they had watched it and had seen it wriggle away, though from first to last we did not catch a glimpse of it or even hear a rustle.

We had not gone much farther when a bird with the most gorgeous plumage was seen resting on a bough almost overhead; scarlet merging into blue, with wonderful long tail feathers, it blazed with colour. This macaw we found to be fairly common, as well as that grotesque creature, the tucan, with its huge sabre-like bill.

Passing a place where the ground was soft and spongy, I noticed depressions such as would be caused by an enormous cat. They were tracks of a jaguar, an animal that roams the jungle freely in this part of the country. In fact, it may be asserted that no one knows what the

utter wilds in these regions do contain in the way of flora and fauna.

I was reconciled to the fact that we were in for another awful walk and, although it was still early morning, shut in as we were by what can best be described as a steaming hot-house with a temperature of 95 degrees, perspiration was already pouring down me, so that to walk even a comparatively short distance clad as I was would have been an utter impossibility. This may sound strange, but no one can understand what a tropical jungle is really like unless he has experienced it. Where fairly open it is bad enough, but when one is surrounded on every side and overhead, bitten continually by myriads of mosquitoes and other noxious creatures, even a mile seems a very long way. I was desperately afraid that my physical endurance would be unequal to the strain when I heaved a sigh of relief at seeing the trail terminate abruptly. The leading man turned towards us and described a semicircle with his hand.

We had arrived at our goal, the land of mystery, the unknown Chucunaque.

It was evident that our arrival was expected, as we were met by four head-men, each carrying a stick of office. These sticks were most curious, their tops being shaped by carving into emblematical figures, each one different. One showed the effigy of a man and filled me with wonder, as the face had a perfect aquiline nose, while the miniature statue was dressed in what appeared to be an antiquated frock coat and top hat. The second was surmounted by a tiny house with a bird hovering overhead. The third was carved in the form of a snake, twining upwards round the stick, terminating at the extreme end in a representation of some grotesque animal. The fourth showed the figure of a man with a decided Mongol type of face (except for the nose), bearing a wand of office.

Two contoolie, or witch doctors, clad in a remarkable

manner, accompanied the head-men. They were dressed to the knees in long garments entirely covered with cabalistic characters and what looked like the signs of the zodiac, all in some way or other worked into, or let into, the cloth in a form of patch-work. I can think of no other way to describe it; it must be seen to be understood. The illustrations will give some idea. They also wore a towering head-dress composed of feathers, many of gorgeous hues, and round their necks row after row, first tight to the neck and reaching almost to their waists, necklaces composed of bones graduated in length and strung together. Each man wore at least twenty, and must have found them a serious encumbrance when walking, while every time they moved they jangled in unison with each step. Many of the pieces of bone were fashioned like pipes, with four holes, and were presumably musical instruments. They carried in their hands rattles, the head of each being made of a small calabash filled with seeds and fastened tightly to a bone handle.

Supporting the four men and contoolie were about fifty Indians. When I saw their weapons I knew I had been plunged from the twentieth century into a pre-historic age. Several carried huge clubs that could only be wielded with both hands and looked like iron, though I knew they were made of *lignum vitæ*; while others had shorter ones which could be used single-handed and had large knobbed tops. A few Indians carried weapons like enormous spear heads, but with short handles only 12 inches long. They were also made of *lignum vitæ*, pointed and sharp-edged. But most of the Indians had bows, some of them 9 feet in length, and monstrous arrows with quintuplicate prongs, each prong barbed like a fish-hook—diabolical-looking things.

They uttered not a single word of greeting, the four head-men and two contoolie walking ahead of us, while the armed Indians closed in behind. It was this that

made me feel more than anything else how far away I was from the outside world. There was something sinister in the silent way these sphinx-like men placed themselves behind us. Though no word was spoken their movements seemed to say: "You are here and here you must remain—there is no escape"; and in this way we processed to the village.

BOOK II



PORTRAIT OF LADY RICHMOND BROWN BY H. S. TUKE, R.A.

CHAPTER I

WE ARE TRANSPLANTED INTO A DIM AND DISTANT PAST— THE WORD OF THE GODS

THE dwellings of the Chucunaque were constructed much like those of the San Blas, except that they appeared to be put together in a more slovenly fashion. Large numbers of men and women were assembled, but were quite silent on seeing us; although, owing to their stoical expression they gave no outward sign, I somehow knew they were terrified. One thing was fairly evident, the Chucunaque Indians and the San Blas Indians at some distant period which it is impossible to determine were all one tribe. The latter, probably in an endeavour to escape extermination by disease, must have left their mainland stronghold and migrated to the archipelago where they now dwell. Those on the islands occasionally came in touch with small coasting schooners, but the section remaining in their original home had continued in almost the same condition for generations, though I cannot hazard a guess how long.

On entering here we were astonished. It was exactly as though we had been transplanted into a dim and distant past, visited in a dream. Passing through the village the contoolie and head-men conducted us into the Chief's house, which was no different from the rest. It was packed tight with the male population. In the middle, suspended from two poles driven into the ground, swung a hammock of wonderful workmanship, woven in a design of exquisitely blended blues, yellows, reds, and white. I expect the material for the purpose

was obtained from the wild cotton tree, or the thin outer skin of young bamboos, and the dyes from roots and plants growing in the jungle.

The Chief reclined in the hammock, the head-men on either side, with the two contoolie just behind. We were given small stools (like those of the San Blas) facing him. Then followed the same nerve-racking silence we had experienced at Allegandee.

The Chief presently greeted us with the same expression used by the San Blas—the word “nueddee”; and this was followed by a peculiar little moaning sound from the assembled Indians. Their language appeared to be very closely allied to that of the San Blas, so we had little difficulty, helped out by signs, in conversing with them, but they spoke much more slowly, the termination of each sentence being followed by the low moaning sound.

A terrible fear of any stranger entering their territory existed in their minds, as the Chief explained that the spirits had commanded that no mortal person outside their own people should ever come within the definitely defined track of country wherein they dwelt, on pain of certain death.

When we had been there for some time I noticed the contoolie every now and again signing to one another, and occasionally stealing furtive glances at us. This became more pronounced as the awful awe that spread throughout the Indians present deepened. All at once, bending over slightly, first one and then the other spoke to the Chief whose face expressed intense fear. It was obvious they were suggesting something which was very repugnant to him. The whispering continuing, his look of consternation deepened, but they seemed obdurate.

Then followed another death-like silence, during which it was evident that he was working himself up to do the bidding of the contoolie, for quietly, but hesitatingly,

he asked us to demonstrate that we were actually spirits sent to heal them and not mortals, though I could see that he was actually shrinking at his temerity, as if trembling before the wrath to come.

It was now our turn to be silent. As we sat there and appeared to think deeply I hope we showed no sign of fear on our faces, and that I was really looking as unconcerned as I was forcing myself to do. What amounted to a command had issued from the Chief's lips, and we were placed in about as tight a corner as it was possible for a man and woman to be. Suddenly Midge pinched me ; I was so startled I barely suppressed an exclamation. He rose to his full height and stood before the Chief and I did likewise. He stretched out his hand, and in a voice of thunder before which the Indians blanched, said :

" We, the healers, will confer with the great spirits and make known to them what you have said, though we know not what the result may be."

Silence fell again. The contoolie strove their utmost to get the Chief to screw up sufficient courage to say something further, but the head-men were left out of it altogether. There is no doubt the witch doctors, or medicine men, feared they would lose their prestige, and that if they had once to play second fiddle they would never again have the same hold over the people after our departure. I believe they would have gone to any lengths to retain the supremacy which had always been their prerogative.

The Chief, for whom I could not but feel sorry, seemed between the devil and the deep sea, but eventually conveyed to us that our god-like powers must become manifest that day. Midge whispered to me :

" You reply—say he'll have our answer shortly, but that we must be left entirely alone, so that we may commune undisturbed with the spirits ; then walk slowly out, don't wait another minute."

I made this reply in as stern a voice as I could command, whereupon we both immediately departed. The Indians remained quite mute as we passed through the building, nor did they make the slightest attempt to hinder us. An awe-stricken silence reigned everywhere. When we were outside, I saw that none followed; the women and children had mysteriously vanished as soon as they had seen us leaving.

"What's our next move?" I asked. "Wouldn't it be a good idea to return and demand one of their dwellings? We shall want it anyhow to rest in."

We retraced our steps, the Indians shrinking from us as we passed. I think they expected a terrible demonstration of our occult powers to descend on their heads then and there. We came to a halt in front of the Chief, stating that a house must be placed at our disposal and that none should enter or come near under any circumstances. The Chief seemed immensely pleased at being able to do anything to make up for his previous daring, and ordered several Indians to empty at once a dwelling of everything except two hammocks. Before we left, Midge commanded that food should be brought.

"I'm glad you thought of that," I said, very materially.

"Well, I'm simply ravenous," he retorted.

An enormous rude earthenware pot, steaming hot, shortly arrived, with enough in it to feed twenty people. We didn't stop to ask ourselves of what ingredients the concoction was composed, but fell to with zest. We were then, as we had commanded, left undisturbed.

"Thank God!" I said, stretching myself out in a hammock, feeling much too exhausted to bother about what live-stock or disease it might harbour.

"Now we *are* in a mess!" I exclaimed.

"Don't worry," he yawned sleepily.

"But we must do something," I retorted.

"Let's go to sleep!" was his provoking reply.

I confess, in spite of all we had gone through, our surroundings, and what might be before us, I dropped fast asleep in that evil-smelling hammock.

I suppose I am not peculiar in this, but at critical moments the most ridiculous things occur to me, and on this occasion I vividly recollect that my last waking thought was to wonder what the supper, which might be my last, contained.

Goodness knows how long I slept, but when I woke I could tell by the sun that it must have been for some hours. Midge was still in a blissfully unconscious state. I don't know whether any of the Indians had been curious enough to look in at us ; if they did they must have thought we had a funny way of communicating with the spirits.

I shook Midge, who started up as if he had been shot. His first words were very ungodlike.

"What the devil do you want to startle me like that for ?"

"You've been asleep for hours," I complained, "and we've not yet thought out the scheme for the supernatural stunt."

"I did that days ago," he replied, "I told you not to worry, and you've wakened me out of a perfectly good sleep long before it's necessary."

I really did feel exasperated.

"Don't you realise that the Indians are still waiting in the Chief's house for you to give them a reply ?"

"Damned good job!" he said, "let 'em wait!" Whereupon he again lay back, grunted, and closed his eyes.

I was very much worried, having no idea what he had up his sleeve, though I supposed by his manner that everything would be all right ; however, I followed his example, and curled up again. But sleep was out of the question. I felt I must speak to somebody, so braved his wrath a second time. Contrary to my

expectation, he was now quite amenable to reason. The change of attitude was soon explained, for he made a dive for the earthenware eating pot and began to feed (didn't I wish I'd held out the ever-successful bait of food before!), never stopping to ask if I felt hungry. At last he turned round and said: "Ready?"

I would have agreed to anything.

"Come on then. Back we go. Neck or nothing. Don't show any surprise; look stern."

Not an Indian was to be seen as we came out of the dwelling, but as we went towards the Chief's house we saw several, who on catching sight of us immediately bolted.

On entering it looked as if no one had moved from the time we had left them. The head-men stood on either side of the Chief and the contoolie behind. An air of suppressed excitement pervaded the room. I still hadn't the slightest idea what Midge was going to do, and realised that unless we could conjure up what would appear to them to be a supernatural spectacle death for us both was a certainty. Of what use would our guns be against hundreds of Indians who could shoot us down with their bows and arrows from the impenetrable bush surrounding the village without our being able to retaliate in any way? We should probably have been struck and never know from which direction the messenger of death had come.

I shall never forget the scene. That the position was a terrible one may be realised, though my description of it may sound fanciful. We advanced towards the centre, but this time did not sit down. Midge without a pause abruptly addressed the Chief.

"You have asked for a sign that we are actually spirits sent to heal you. The contoolies' wisdom and the power of your Shu-mimi (the carved wooden gods of the Indians) have failed. We know the burning herbs in

the cearnala (earthenware pots) have been useless. You are dying—you must die ; soon none of you will be left, yet we who have been sent to heal are asked to show that we can save you from death. Ichee (itch), ookaare (festering sores), isabad (small-pox), poorpooroolii (tuberculosis) are killing you all—you cannot escape ; pepewanicka oomie nicka cea ookaaree (even as they bear children your women rot). Shall we depart leaving you in your misery ? ”

Stifled groans quivered through the building. Midge's hand shot out towards the Chief.

“ Setagi Sagala, contoolie, revedisura (come here, Chief, contoolie, head-men). Stand before us and hear the command of the Great Spirits with whom we have spoken. At the first hour of darkness you will assemble together, every man, woman, and child that can walk ; the sick must be carried. You, together with the contoolie and head-men must stand in front of the people in the open space facing our dwelling and then you will be shown the power, the might, and, it may be, the wrath of the greatest of all great spirits. Fail to do this and know that you and your people will be utterly consumed in frightful fire—a fire that will rise from the ground—the fire of the mighty gods, against which no man can prevail.”

A low, dreadful moan broke from the Chief, while the contoolie and Indians shook as if stricken with palsy ; several times their leader tried to speak but could not. In solemn tones Midge now spoke three words :

“ Ni Sagala lennaga (we go Indian Chief).”

We stalked from the hut leaving the ruler of the Chucunaque prostrate in his hammock, while the head-men and contoolie sank to the ground, as did all the other Indians. What little animation they were possessed of had fled ; they were utterly cowed.

Arrived at our dwelling my first words were :

"I feel awfully sorry for those poor Indians—you've crushed the life out of them, but you haven't yet told me what your scheme is."

"When we get under cover I'll tell you all about it, and you'll find there'll never be any further question as to whether we're supernatural or not."

As soon as we got inside our hut he outlined his plan.

"I had this emergency in my mind when I brought those red flares. When I was in the Mosquitia I found they were far more effective than any guns. Think what happened at Neadupo; how the Indians bolted—it paralysed them. There was method in my madness when I insisted that the whole village, and even the sick, should be assembled to-night. As certain as we're here they'll get a shock which they'll not only remember themselves but whose story will become one of their legends. This is the idea. We'll stick the flares in the ground; they won't see us in the dark."

"Good!" I answered, the spirit of the adventure appealing to me. "I'll strike them off at one end and you at the other."

"Splendid! that's a great thought."

Feeling very bucked at this rare praise, and unwilling to give him the satisfaction of seeing it, I asked derisively whether he expected me to do the Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego act and stand in the middle of the burning fiery furnace. To my utter amazement he simply jumped at the idea.

"What a woman!" he exclaimed. "'Where's that damned bundle? Where are those clothes?'"

"What's the matter with what I've got on?" I asked.

"Good God! they're no use. The white dress, white stockings, and those lumps of glass and pearls—you're going to be a wraith—standing in that red blaze you'll

be utterly transformed, you'll have changed from the tangible top-booted figure they know into a spirit rising from the earth in the midst of the flames. We must be in a flat position when we strike the flares so as to rise up simultaneously with the blaze."

My eyes had been roaming round the bare dwelling.

"The bundles aren't here," I said; "where can they be?"

"Damn it. They must have carried them to the Chief's house; I'll get them."

Without another word he left me, returning in a few minutes accompanied by three quaking Indians bearing the things we wanted.

"They're in an awful state," Midge chuckled; "the whole village is assembled. When I entered the Chief's house the confounded contoolie were up to something again."

We were not kept long in doubt what this fresh move might be. I had just changed into the white dress when Midge said:

"They're coming here. Keep out of sight. Don't let them see you."

I could see through a chink in the bamboo sides of the hut that the Chief, head-men, and contoolie had arrived and were standing a few yards from the entrance. Midge went to the opening, whereupon the deputation, thoroughly crushed, commenced to assert that they were convinced we were not of this world. Obviously they were afraid something awful was going to happen to them, and they quaintly informed us that they were certain we could destroy them all with fire if we wanted and assured us that our commands throughout the Chucunaque were law. This did not suit us at all. Having gone so far, to withdraw now would have been fatal.

Midge replied, as I felt sure he would, that the gods had spoken, their word was unchangeable, and that

that night all the assembled people would see how we were guarded by the great spirits whose messengers we were. They departed crestfallen, and as the night closed in we heard an awful wailing rising up from the Chief's house. It was a terrible sound, combining fear and misery to the last degree.

CHAPTER II

THE AWFUL FIRE OF THE GODS ENVELOPED US—THE
GREAT SPIRITS—OUR WORD IS LAW

THE darkness deepened, but as yet I had seen no signs of the Indians assembling in the open space in front of our dwelling, as we had directed, and I wondered whether they would be brave enough to funk it! But just before the given hour I dimly saw the crowd unwillingly gathering. There was no doubt our command would be obeyed, though it was pathetic to see how many of the poor things had to be carried; it was the tiny children that upset me most. Our strict injunctions were being followed to the letter, for the Chief, contoolie, and head-men were now standing in front of the assembled people.

"No hurry," said Midge; "the longer they're kept in suspense the greater the effect'll be when we start the fireworks."

We waited for at least half an hour, by which time it was pitch dark. Thank goodness there was no moon.

"Now for it!" he said.

Stealing out we forced the wooden handles of the flares into the ground a short distance from each other, and then lay flat down.

"I'm ready," I whispered.

"Let go then," was the answer.

As hard as I could I fired them off. The effect was startling and my eyes were absolutely dazzled with the burst of red flame. Volumes of lurid smoke swirled upwards, amidst which we rose, standing perfectly still

and silent, with the red clouds enveloping us. My eyes watered ; I was seized with a choking sensation, with difficulty suppressing a most human attack of sneezing. We had stood like this for a full minute when I was startled by the most dreadful wail I have ever heard. It started on a low note, crescendoing into a high falsetto—lost hope, pulsating terror—the cry of the damned—all seemed blended in one. The echoes caught it, the sound dying away leaving a throbbing silence ; then a maddened shriek burst forth as blind panic seized them—sheer, utter, absolute. They rushed backwards—whether it was because their eyes were dazzled by the glare, or whether they were overwhelmed with the belief that destruction was advancing on them, I cannot say, but in their headlong dash they burst clean through the sides of the buildings, and we could hear them flying for their lives.

The fire died down, flickered feebly and went out, only the glowing handles in the ground remaining. One by one these faint lights also disappeared, leaving us enfolded by the sable night. We were alone—alone in a village deserted by all but the sick. Those that had been carried to the open space were abandoned and lay moaning, while punctuating the air we could hear curious cries as the Indians continued their headlong flight into the bush beyond, the sound gradually becoming fainter and fainter. I felt quite unnerved.

" This is awful," I said, my thoughts reverting to the sick people on the ground ; " can't we do something for these poor creatures ? "

" Damn it ! " said Midge, " who would have thought they'd desert the place leaving all their diseased behind them ? Now we're in a mess."

" How on earth are we going to get them back to their huts ? " I asked.

" It's the devil ; we can't start doing ambulance work for all these people—they're lying there in dozens."

"I'll get changed into my breeches," I suggested, "and then we'll see what we can do."

It was a hopeless task. As we came near many made almost superhuman efforts to crawl away, and it was ages before we were able to reassure them somewhat. And, oh! the poor little kiddies, they were a heart-rending sight.

"At any rate," I said, "we'll carry them to our place and do what we can for them."

I soothed and petted them as well as I could; though I don't easily cry, tears were running down my cheeks, and when Midge spoke I knew by the gruffness of his voice that their plight had upset him. Time passed and we still went on carrying them into our hut. I was appalled by the numbers, and knew we should have to get the Indians to return by hook or by crook, otherwise the consequences of being left alone with all these sick people would be too awful to contemplate. Neither of us had the faintest idea how to feed them, but in any case it would have been impossible for two people to cope with such a task. I was finally compelled to own we could do nothing more that night. My mind contained only one thought—that as soon as it was light we must go out and get in touch with the Indians.

"Put on your white dress again," advised Midge; "you must appear before them as you did in the flames."

Sleep was an impossibility. All my time was occupied attending to the little ones. In spite of this it seemed as if the day would never break—it was a night of horrors—I was thankful when it was over. As for taking any food—when I looked at the sickening mess in the earthenware pot I turned away in disgust; one glance was enough. Midge attacked it boldly, but after the first mouthful beat a hurried retreat outside. Giving him time to recover, I joined him.

"Now for these infernal lunatics; come on!"

We had barely started when he noticed I was still in my breeches ; so engrossed had I been with the children that I had forgotten to change.

" Back into that dress ! " he said.

" What does it matter ? " I asked wearily, " they've seen me like this before."

" It matters everything ; to them you must now appear as the spirit they saw last night."

Seeing no help for it, I returned and got into my regalia.

We strode through the village and beyond, but could see no sign of life anywhere. When we arrived at the edge of the bush we called " Setagi ! " loudly, but there was no answer. A slight movement amid the foliage caught my eye.

" There's something moving in there," I whispered.

Midge beckoned, whereupon the wretched Chief appeared, followed by the contoolie and head-men. Once more we both called " Setagi ! " Foot by foot they approached—I couldn't help feeling sorry for them ; they reminded me of a dog creeping to the foot of its master after a beating.

They finally came close, cringing before us, and their eyes never left me.

" Say something to them," said Midge ; " reassure them."

I took a step forward and raised my hand, saying in what I'm certain was rather a shaky voice :

" The great spirits have answered ; fear not. Commands have been given and you must at once gather all the people, assemble them in the open space, and we will make known to you the will of the gods."

They seemed overjoyed at this message, and in an incredibly short time the Indians commenced to congregate. They were evidently not far away, but lurking in the dense bush surrounding the village. It was not to be wondered at that we had seen no sign

of life, for the jungle was so dense that the numbers hidden there might have been legion.

When they had all arrived, Midge addressed the multitude.

" Know these are the commands of the great spirits. Though at first their wrath was terrible, so that you were all in danger of being consumed by the fire that rose from the ground, the fire of the gods against which none can stand, one blast from which would have destroyed every house and every Indian, we pleaded for you, and the great gods have answered. You are dying. Soon the Chucunaque will all be dead. But we are sent to save you and will cure you. Yet know our word must be obeyed in everything. Shortly we must leave you, but the great spirits in their mercy have spoken, and when we depart, the contoolie, through us, will be given knowledge and certain medicine, and they will be shown how to continue the healing of the people as spoken by the word of the gods."

The effect of this speech on the medicine men was remarkable—they visibly swelled with importance; instead of the dread which they hitherto had that their prestige would suffer, a miracle had happened; for were they not, before all the assembled peoples, informed that they would shortly be vested with the full powers and wisdom of the great spirits?

From then onwards our slightest wish was law. If we had said it was necessary that the whole village should be burnt down, it would have been done without a murmur.

From what we had already seen it was apparent much work lay in front of us. Never had I seen disease more rampant, though it was nothing to what we saw later when we visited their dwellings. After the sick Indians had all been taken back to their homes, we held a short meeting with the contoolie, making it clear that it was necessary they should accompany us and be present

when we attended the sufferers, so that they might learn how to continue the good work after we had left.

Our first patients were the Chief, his wife, and children. They were suffering, as were practically the whole tribe, from so terrible a form of itch as to baffle description—so virulent that in many instances the hair had entirely rotted from the head, while the body was covered with suppurating sores. I don't think there was a single man, woman, or child among the entire population who had not symptoms, in a greater or lesser degree, of this awful complaint. No doubt this is largely accounted for by the fact that from the smallest children upwards they are persistently scratching themselves; the irritation must be terrible. Sulphur ointment was our stand-by for this; fortunately we had a large quantity with us. Not only had the complaint attacked the body, but in many cases they were suffering great pain from the ear, the trouble even penetrating to the drum, and with some the hearing had been entirely destroyed.

Over and above this, small-pox in its most malignant form was everywhere prevalent, one house we entered exhibiting an appalling sight. Four Indians were lying in their hammocks—three women and a man, all of whom had died that morning, their bodies in a terrible state and completely covered with the festering sores of the small-pox. A tiny babe was lying on the breast of one of the women—it could not have been more than two months old, and was in the last stages of this dread disease, the face and head enormously swollen, lips protruding and cracked, while its poor little eyelids, quite closed, were stuck together. Of course we could not do anything, and the little thing died as we watched it.

It was dreadful. I really felt I could not go on. I would more cheerfully have faced the unknown terrors of the jungle than have to go through with the task we had set out to accomplish.

Not a dwelling did we visit without finding small-pox ; it must have been with them for generations. Trachoma was also prevalent, an infectious complaint which attacks the eyes ; in some advanced cases the eyes were entirely bloodshot, as if a vein had burst.

In discussing this later with several doctors, they expressed the opinion that trachoma arose among them through their staple diet being unripe plantains and bananas.

Again we saw many cases of chiggers—a parasite which usually gets beneath the toe nails, where the female deposits her eggs. If care is taken it can usually be removed with a needle, but if left, may give rise to blood poisoning. It had not only attacked the feet of the Indians, but had also entered the eyes of the children. In their ignorance the people had not realised in the early stages what was causing the trouble, with the result that the awful work of the insect had continued, until at last the eyes had been more or less eaten out, leaving them totally blind, and suppurating so badly that the discharge was running down their cheeks. This was one of the worst sights of all—horrible ! I still shudder when I recall it.

It is scarcely necessary for me to say that help or remedy for many of these diseases was impossible ; we could only do our best to disinfect and clean them generally ; but we were successful in curing many minor complaints.

Hookworm was universal among the children, and they were a prey to tuberculosis. One young woman had become so emaciated that her bones seemed as if they must break through their frail covering of skin.

The first day we found that about four hours was as much as we could stand, the sights being so nauseating as to sicken the strongest stomach. We had not eaten anything since the afternoon of the previous day, so

issued orders that food should be brought us immediately. Imagine my amazement when I saw, accompanying the now familiar earthenware pot, four large lizards, with their legs tied together to prevent them escaping.

"Why this?" I asked. "Are they presented to us as pets? They surely don't expect us to eat them?"

But that is just what they did, for it appears lizards are considered one of the greatest delicacies, and the food we had eaten the evening before had largely consisted of them. My feelings may be imagined, and my mind reverted to Midge's story of how, some years ago, after enjoying a wonderful meal a native had cooked for him, he praised the boy, unsuspectingly asking him of what it had consisted, and was told "rats!" I suspected that the steaming earthenware cauldron contained more of those beastly reptiles, but was ravenously hungry, so it was that or nothing. I had ceased entirely to be finicky over my food.

As soon as night fell the curious mournful strains, similar to those the San Blas Indians had made on their reed instruments, commenced. Tired out I lay, dressed as I was, full length in the hammock and fell into a heavy sleep. The sun was well up when I awoke and my first thought was that I must take the camera with me when we started our round.

Soon after leaving I got a picture of the village, though two little kiddies that happened to be close by at once fled, and from this I expected it would be difficult to take any near pictures and groups of the people.

The day passed in the seemingly endless task of attending the stricken Indians. In every hut where sick lay we found the same means had been employed by the contoolie to drive out the evil spirit which was supposed to have possessed the sufferer. I cannot do better than describe a typical scene.

A number of men and women were collected round the hammock ; two small earthenware pots were filled with smouldering herbs, which threw off an acrid smoke. Every now and again the sufferer was seized with a violent fit of coughing, after which the head would feebly hang over the side of the hammock, saliva pouring from the mouth. Far from bringing about a cure, they could not have employed a more effective means of spreading the infection.

Besides the two pots there were four wooden gods placed on the ground, two at each end of the hammock and a half calabash filled with round white pebbles, a similar receptacle with pieces of bone, a third with the teeth of crocodiles and animals, and a fourth with lumps of what looked like bark. All this heterogeneous rubbish was beneath the hammock. We always scrapped the lot, though I could see when we first started to do so they were greatly shocked.

Once or twice a day the contoolie would come moaning over the patient, always carrying some fresh " medicine." No wonder they were in such a terrible condition.

Another means taken to drive away the evil spirit from a person was to put the skull of a green turtle at the head of the hammock in which the patient lay, while at the foot were the jaw-bones of a pig or wild hog, a wooden god being placed on either side. Alongside one Indian who was very ill we found two dried land crabs, and the enormous jaws of a crocodile, complete with teeth.

We always ordered the accumulation of odds and ends to be taken to our dwelling, and after a little I got quite used to it, especially as I realised what a remarkable collection we were amassing in this way. It is impossible to give a full account of all the strange rubbish the contoolie had placed below the patients and in with them, but their greatest fetish and most potent medicine merits a full description. It was only used as a last

resource, and when an Indian was on the point of death ; and if he subsequently recovered it was considered that a miracle had indeed occurred. As far as I could discover only males were privileged to undergo the treatment.

At the time we did not attach the importance that leading scientists in England, after careful examination, have given to this fetish, which has proved to be unique. It is a human male foetus. Professor Sir Arthur Keith, F.R.S., who is regarded throughout the world as one of the greatest living anthropologists, gives it as his opinion that its age was from five to six months when it was removed from the womb of the mother. It had been preserved perfect in every single detail—even the fine skin ; and under a microscope one can see the commencement of the eye-brows. This preservation of an embryonic child shows a scientific knowledge of the highest order in contradistinction to their conditions of living and habits. All who have seen it are unanimous in the opinion that it had neither been smoked, sun-dried, nor cured by any process known to-day ; neither had it been treated with spirit ; yet it is as perfect as when first removed from the mother.

Subsequent close examination disclosed that this foetus had a skull formation hitherto entirely unknown. Although this has been explained to me, I feel I hardly dare give a scientific description, as there are so many others far more capable ; but when we were told by every expert that it was probably the only specimen of its kind in the world we felt its proper place was the British Museum, to which we have gladly presented it.

I should like here to point out that the treatment of this foetus is far in advance of any method of preservation as practised by the Egyptians ; but it is not peculiar to the Chucunaque Indians, for later we were able to obtain a collection of perfectly reduced human heads



THE CHIEF FETISH OF THE CHUCUNAQUE (p. 142).
Now in the British Museum.

of both sexes, showing not only the features retaining their life-like appearance, though reduced in size, but accurate in every detail, even to the hair on the head eye-brows, eye-lashes and—in the case of several males—the hair on the face and in ears and nostrils.

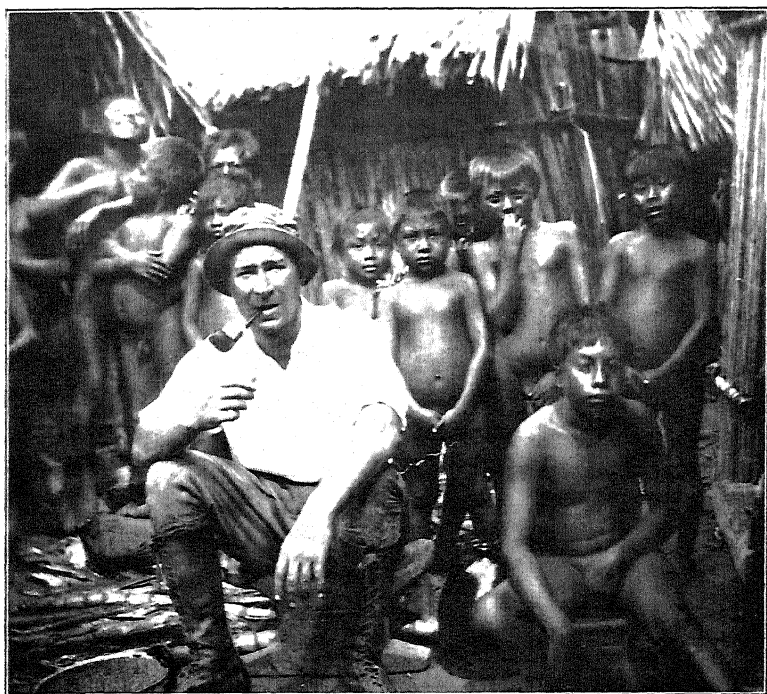
A curious practice exists with regard to these heads. After removal from the body the flesh is opened in an upward direction at the back of the neck; the entire skull and brains are removed, pounded up and eaten by whoever performs the operation, the idea being to absorb the intellect of the dead person and thus obtain greater knowledge. How the features and even the hair are reduced in size in perfect proportion I do not know. It is certain that by word of mouth a knowledge must be handed down of a high art and skill greater than any we possess to-day as applied to preservation and embalming.

This is especially remarkable when one takes into account that the Jivaros Indians and the lesser-known Tibolos, who make a speciality of this, are culturally extremely low. I cannot answer the riddle—for riddle it is, but feel that one day light may be thrown on these Central and South American tribes which will be a revelation to the whole world.

I particularly wanted to photograph the people and wondered how it could be accomplished. "Simple enough," replied Midge; "we'll order the entire population to gather in front of our hut to-morrow."

But it was difficult to convince them at first that the camera was harmless. Drawing wildly on our imagination we explained that the gods would look on them through the eye in the box and that if they watched carefully they would all see it move. In this way we managed to get several good results, and later in the day I was fortunate enough to secure a photograph of Midge in one of the houses, surrounded by the male children.

Their dwellings, as I have said, were very similar to those of the San Blas, thirty to fifty families living in each and sleeping in hammocks. Adjoining was another building about the same size, where they squatted about all day long and where they kept their weapons, earthenware cooking pots, and all sorts of odds and ends.



CHUCUNAQUE INDIAN CHILDREN (p. 143).



SAN BLAS INDIAN WOMEN, ALLEGANDEE (p. 96).

CHAPTER III

THE MYSTERY OF THE CHUCUNAQUE HIEROGLYPHIC PICTURE-WRITING—THE FEAST OF THE HAIR-CUTTING AND MARRIAGE CUSTOMS

THE women spent the whole of their day working the most complicated and intricate designs on cloth. These works of art must take an immensely long time to do, though of course it will be understood that time as measured by conventional standards means nothing to them. I can only describe this work on cloth as picture-writing. The finished pieces are very carefully preserved, folded up, and placed in large calabashes which were hung up round the walls of the buildings.

We had previously heard legends that the Spanish Conquistadores on first landing in Central America had tried to penetrate the Indians' territory, and we were able to prove the truth of the story.

During the time we remained in the Chucunaque we were presented with a huge collection of these pieces of cloth. I did not realise until my return to England what a large number we had. We found when they were unpacked there were 1,600 pieces. It was impossible to go through them carefully all at once. The experts in London who examined them drew attention to the fact that several of the pieces of cloth were trimmed with Spanish lace of the period of the Spanish Conquistadores, and that much of the velvet-like material was equally old. So carefully had it been preserved that to-day it hardly shows the ravages of time, and on the

face of it I think we can assert that these Indians did come in contact in some way with the Spanish invaders. While in England we exhibited many pieces of this cloth, gods, weapons, and other examples of native handicraft, to the Fellows of the Royal Anthropological Institute in the rooms of the Royal Society, Burlington House, where they were carefully examined with the greatest interest by the Fellows. At the same time Mr. Mitchell Hedges lectured, and propounded a theory relative to the mystery surrounding the various races of Indians in Central America. At the end of the lecture, in an endeavour to throw light on the subject, he asked if there were any scientists present who would make an attempt to decipher the hieroglyphic designs, in which case we should be only too pleased to put every facility in their way, and lend them any pieces of cloth that they might choose for the purpose. I am glad to be able to record that this had a very happy result, and the utmost credit is due to Mr. Ludovic MacLellan Mann, of Glasgow, who was present at the time, for the painstaking way he went into the subject, and I have his permission to give verbatim his observations, after he had devoted considerable time to this highly technical study. Two photographs are published, and the designs which they represent are apparently the survival of an ancient system of pictographic Calendric signs, probably beyond the comprehension of any modern student.

Mr. MacLellan Mann writes as follows :

“(1) The yellow and black panel showing 10 human figures with uplifted arms, which should be read as 14 figures, one for each day of a half-month; the 4 dots above the heads have a duplicating value. Thus the total number of figures is 10 plus 4, equal to 14. The 10 figures each represent apparently a night of actual moonlight—or one aspect of the moon-god; and the dots perhaps the dark days or the days of much reduced light.



CHUCUNAGUE PICTURE WRITING ON CLOTH (p. 116).
Now in the British Museum.

" The figures it will be observed are marshalled in good order according to their heights, beginning with a height of 6 inches and finishing with one of $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches. The gradation of size is remarkable and seems to portray the gradual growth in size of the moon.

" As is common among primitive peoples, including the Central Americans, the waxing of the moon period was the lucky period, and was thus symbolised. To carry a garment depicting the waxing of the moon was calculated to induce prosperity.

" On one of the shorter margins of the rectangular panel there are 19 bent bars, representing the 19 days' difference between an eclipse year (346'62 days) and a solar year of 365'24 days. Along one of the lunar sides there are 7 wavy lines which seem to symbolise the 7 days of the week growing gradually in size from $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches to 5 inches as the week increases.

" On the other side of the panel is a frieze of 19 tree-like designs ; or, what is more probable, designs based upon the human figure, and having a like symbolism to the 19 marginal strokes.

" On the obverse side there are patterns reminiscent of Maya Glyphs in square rectangular panels, evidently a degenerate, yet beautiful, geometric colour scheme, the original meaning of which I have no doubt was quite lost to the makers of the cloth. These people evidently made a large number of successive copies in the course of centuries, but adhered with remarkable tenacity to the aspect of the original schemes.

" (2) This small cloth sewn only on one side seems as a whole to be symbolical of one solar year. The remarkable irregularity of the outline very much resembles the outline of the monolithic sculpturings of the Maya. This panel contains in its centre 12 squares each of which has a curious design, often complicated, and most distinctly copied from the Maya month signs. The number 12 seems to be chosen because of the

division of the year into 12 sections, which again had its origin from the fact that there are 12 circuitings of the moon in a year. These glyphs are accompanied at the top by the usual 19 signs or bars, and at the base by rows of small parallel bars."

We are presenting a number of these pieces of cloth to the British Museum, the Museums of Oxford and Cambridge, and others. Possibly through the medium of this picture-writing fresh light may be thrown on the mystery of these hitherto unknown people.

The Chucunaque, both male and female, closely resemble the San Blas in height, build, and general appearance; in fact it would be difficult to distinguish them apart, though it seemed to me that the skulls of both sexes exhibited a stronger Mongol appearance than the tribes living on the islands. By this I mean that the head was larger and rounder, the hair black, straight, and coarse, with the eyes oblique in almost every instance, and their colour was a shade lighter than that of the San Blas. Culturally they were down to the level (if not lower) of the most primitive tribes known. They showed not the slightest knowledge of proper feeding, as the sickening mass they perpetually consumed would alone have been conducive to disease.

In the dwelling adjoining their sleeping place a fire is always kept burning. It is made in the following way. Having once been started, 6 tree trunks, roughly 10 feet in length, are placed with one end in the fire, and as they are consumed are pushed a little further in. An earthenware pot made of some clayey substance, and crudely fashioned by hand, is placed on this, into which everything edible is thrown. Their diet consists of yams, a species of pumpkin; a variety of corn raised by themselves, which I have never seen anywhere else; unripe plantains, pineapples, bananas, mamee, and many other local fruits and vegetables. These alone would be bad enough, but added to them are



CHUCUNAQUE PICTURE WRITING ON CLOTH (p. 148).
Now in the British Museum.

large iguanos (lizards) thrown in alive just as they are caught.

Very occasionally they are able to kill the wedera (wild pig) or the yeeno (wild hog), and these in their entirety go into the boiling pot, the whole being stirred by Indian women in turn with strangely fashioned mardoonaormakadi (sticks). There seems to be no fixed feeding hour ; apparently they all help themselves from this common pot when the spirit moves them.

Their particular food, however, and I might also say drink, is the pure juice of the sugar-cane, which they cultivate in a rough, almost slovenly, way, though it seems to do remarkably well, chiefly owing to the climate. The manner in which the juice is extracted is an instance of what can be accomplished by primitive races without modern appliances or machinery. How the knowledge originated that the cane held this juice, and that it would prove a nourishing and staple diet, it is impossible to say—I suppose it was much like the man who ate the first oyster ; and even when they had discovered its value, the method by which they extract the syrupy liquid shows that they have retained the knowledge here displayed by ancient tradition or unexpected ingenuity ; if the latter, it is very much in opposition to their ignorance in the majority of other things and would prove they must occasionally think in the abstract.

First two holes are made in the trunk of a palm tree, about 5 feet from the ground. A long straight young tree trunk, chosen for its elasticity, and roughly about 18 feet long, is placed into the top hole ; in the one immediately beneath another long straight branch or tree trunk is put, but whereas the top piece is left rounded, the one underneath has the surface slightly flattened. They are set so that a few inches of space remain between the two.

At the extreme end of the topmost piece of wood

farthest from where it is fixed in the palm tree, a bamboo pole is driven firmly into the ground.

A quantity of the sugar-cane in its natural state is brought here and piled in a heap ; a single length of cane is taken, and the end inserted between the two pieces of wood, whereupon an Indian mounts and balances herself (for it is only the women who perform this task) on the end, holding the upright support with one hand, and commences to jig up and down.

Prior to this one of their large earthenware pots has been placed on the ground exactly beneath where the cane is inserted.

Immediately the jiggling starts at the end of the topmost pole, the resilient wood comes down hard on the slightly flattened surface of the wood beneath it, crushing the cane, from which the juice immediately runs out into the receptacle prepared for it. An Indian pushes the piece of cane from one side, while another pulls it from the other until the end is reached, when it is twisted in opposite directions in much the same way as a towel is wrung out, and again passed between the two pieces of wood, so that the last drop of sugary sap is squeezed out of it, gallons being collected in this way every day.

The Indians drink it in its pure state with great enjoyment. I tried it and thought it the most sickly sweet stuff I had ever tasted, and as they always pour quantities into their boiling cauldrons, stirring it up with all the other mixture I have described, the whole forms a most horrible concoction and is certainly an acquired taste.

Knowing the fattening propensities of sugar, one would expect to find both sexes decidedly corpulent, but the men show little, if any, superfluous fat, and women who were obese I should think became so by reason of the annual child-birth.

It would be the greatest mistake to despise the

efficiency of the weapons of these people, though at first sight they seemed so crude as to be almost laughable. Large flat weapons shaped like a spear head, the lightest about 3 pounds in weight, the heaviest fully 6 pounds, were carried by nearly all of the men. They were made of *lignum vitæ*, the points being sharpened, as were the outer edges. A well-delivered straight thrust to any vulnerable part of the body would probably prove fatal, as would a downward smashing blow with the sharpened edge if the full force fell on either head or neck.

A certain number of Indians carried clubs, some of which were so heavy that two hands were required to wield them; the largest weighed quite 20 pounds. Others had smaller single-handed clubs with a knobbed end, also made of *lignum vitæ*.

All used the bow, arrow, and spear. The bows, which ranged in size from 3 feet 6 inches in length to 9 feet, were made from black palm, the cord being strong plaited or twisted vegetable fibre.

The arrows are worthy of description. In nearly every instance the heads were quintuplicate, the centre prong of the five projecting beyond the other four. These are also made from the black palm, and barbed like fish hooks. The head is ingeniously fitted to a long strong reed shaft of very light weight. I practised shooting with these weapons and found their driving force terrific, and the accuracy with which the Indians shoot is remarkable.

Their spears were constructed in much the same way as the arrows, except that they were very large. They ranged in length from 8 to 14 feet, but it is difficult to understand to what use the very long spears are put.

A blow-pipe, made from a hollow reed through which a dart is propelled, is also known to them, but the most deadly thing about their weapons is that they are all steeped in a virulent poison, of which we learnt the secret. It is concocted in the following way. Having

procured the liver of an animal they let it rot, and when it is in a state of putrefaction they purposely infuriate some venomous snakes. The rotten liver is then held out to the reptiles on the end of a stick, and into it they drive their fangs time and again, saturating the putrid offal with their deadly poison. The points of the arrows, blow-pipe darts, and spears are steeped therein, and the deadly effect on anyone pierced by the barbs may be imagined.

We found not a single example of stone or metal used in their weapons, and I think one can safely say that they were unversed in the use of anything but wood.

Like most primitive tribes they have their feasts. There seems to be no particular ritual attached to these, though I should judge they synchronise with certain lunar stages. My observations led me to believe that what little knowledge of time they possessed was ruled by the moon.

We were fortunate enough to be there for one of these moon feasts, in which the whole population took part, but it is unnecessary for me to describe it, as I later witnessed a more characteristic one—the celebration of the transition from girlhood into womanhood. It is called the Ceremony of Hair-cutting.

For some time beforehand members of the girl's family, helped by the other Indians, are busily engaged in preparing all sorts of foods. On the day appointed by the witch doctors, the Chief, his head-men, and the entire population arrive, the last to appear being the contoolie, who take charge, bringing with them an old priestess, who on the occasion I have in mind was the wife of one of the contoolie. It was her business to have the immediate supervision of the young girl, who is placed in a large hole previously dug in a corner of the dwelling, a stockade of palm and banana leaves being made round it. The hole is then filled up with earth and sand until the girl is entirely covered to the

shoulders. The old priestess, at a word from the contoolie, leads off with a chant, which is taken up, first by the relatives of the girl, and then joined in by the whole assemblage. This suddenly stops, the old woman sprinkles the girl with water, then, placing half a calabash over her head, a small piece of hair is burnt off with a red hot ember, which later is buried in the sand. The old priestess appears, raises her hands, and again the chant breaks out. This lasts some time, and when ceasing another piece of hair is burnt off.

The burying of the ember in the sand each time is symbolical, as is the throwing on of cold water, and is intended to signify the trials and troubles the girl will have to encounter, and the chanting and singing the pleasures that are before her in life.

I could not help contrasting the enjoyment of the Indians with the misery the poor wretched girl must be undergoing, buried up to her shoulders in the earth, especially as this—apparently their greatest ceremony—continued a long time. From first to last she was in the position described for over six hours, while the hair was being slowly removed, ending at the nape of the neck, after which she was released from her cramped position. She was by then unable to stand, and had to be carried to a hammock when her part in the entertainment was over, and after this nobody took the slightest notice of her, but the real business commenced.

It is difficult to put into words the mad scene which now took place. First of all a dance started—women advancing towards one another in lines, retreating with a curious jiggling motion. Then the men followed suit, the contoolie leading throughout. The flames—quite 40 feet in height—from a gigantic fire that had been built roared upwards, and their lurid light added to the weird and uncanny spectacle, the witch doctors especially looking for all the world like fiends of hell, with their towering feathered head-dresses, masses of bone neck-

laces, and strange-looking patch-work garments. The insistent noise of the rattles and the moaning of the reed pipes, added to the chanting, rose upwards, maddening the people until they lost all control of themselves.

The dancing continued without a pause; as one group finished this queer jigging another lot took their place, while the previous dancers fell ravenously on the cauldrons of food. This continued till dawn, and only ceased when the people were so worn out and glutted that they could no longer stand.

The trials of the heroine of the hour, however, were not yet over, for a month later there was another feast exactly the same in character, but this time the hair was singed close to the head. She was now a woman and eligible for marriage, her age being about thirteen.

The marriage ceremony is very quaint. Neither the boy nor girl has any say in the matter. Her father, having fixed his eye on a likely youth, visits his parents. Goodness only knows what they talk about, but it is evidently a matter of considerable consequence, for it usually takes three days of solid argument, and is conducted with much secrecy, the reason, no doubt, being that the greatest care is taken that neither the girl nor boy should have any suspicion of the web that is being woven round them.

A few days after this the youth is considerably surprised to find himself suddenly pounced on. He offers no resistance of any sort and is carried by the male relatives of the girl into her home. Her female relations are in the secret, for they are all assembled and at once place her in a hammock. At this stage the contoolie appears and drones a short incantation; and the boy is then placed on top of her in the hammock. Herb fires are lit in earthenware pots, which are ranged beneath the hammock, the smoke enveloping it, the wooden gods of both families placed round them—the chant of the contoolie again starts, the mournful cadence rising

fortissimo, whereupon everyone joins in. The hulla-baloo dies down and as it ceases the boy is removed. No one is present at this ceremony except the immediate families concerned.

Then follows a feast, after which the boy departs to his dwelling, seemingly quite unconcerned.

Twice more during the next fortnight the wretched boy and girl go through the same ordeal.

Now comes the consummation of this curious marriage custom. After all this elaborate ceremony one would naturally expect it to culminate in a wild orgy of dancing and feasting on this, the greatest occasion of all—but no, the finish is simplicity itself. The father of the girl meets the boy at daybreak and they go into the bush together, returning at sunset carrying a load of wood on their shoulders. This finally cements the marriage. Contrary to civilised ideas the girl does not go to her husband's house to live—he has to go to hers, removing his weapons, and whatever possessions he may have, from his family home to his wife's, and there he is obliged to remain, whether he likes it or not, until after the birth of the first child, when, if the woman so desires (the man having no choice in the matter), she can go to live in his family house, but this happens very seldom.

Undoubtedly the woman rules the man henceforth and is the leader. Outside the contoolie, Chief, and headmen, her word is law throughout the Chucunaque. It matters not whether it is a question of building a new dwelling, getting food, going into the bush for wood, or any other such domestic detail, the man never dreams of making a move unless told to do so by the woman.

In many instances they were undoubtedly incestuous, while by the rigid decree of their gods, as spoken through the mouth of the contoolie men, they were strictly endogamous. In this lies a simple solution of the tuberculosis and other diseases which were rampant ;

it may also possibly explain the several cases of leprosy we saw.

I should say that quite 10 per cent. were albinos, both sexes, the skin being dead white throughout, with light straw-coloured hair and pale blue eyes. They were ghastly-looking objects, owing to the fact that in every instance they were covered with a hideous eruption, which showed up more plainly on account of their white skin. Like the albinos of the San Blas they were viewed with disfavour, their advent into the world in this guise being looked on as the work of evil spirits. Marriage with or among them was strictly forbidden.

There is little doubt that, owing to the ravages of the various malignant diseases I have enumerated, the numbers of the Indians have been greatly reduced, especially, I should say, recently, and unless they follow the example of the San Blas and emigrate to the coast, it must be merely a question of time before they cease to exist.

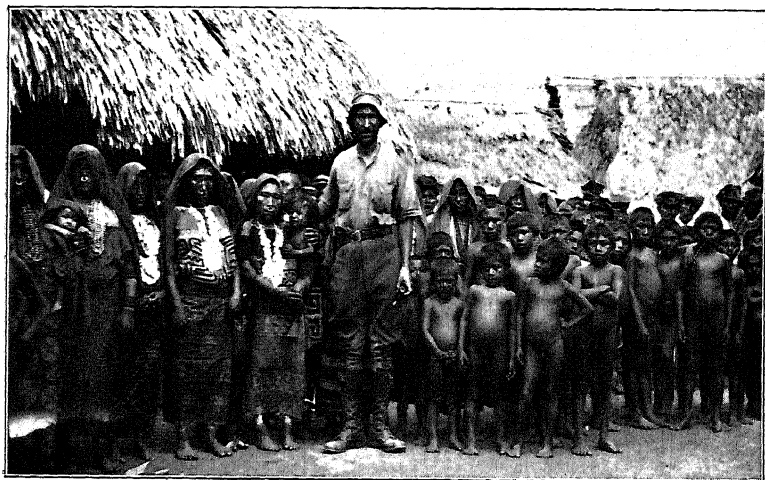
Affection, as we know it, does not seem to exist between the sexes; kissing is unknown, and each appears to be quite indifferent to the other.

In their breeding culturally they are on an animal level. No sexual intercourse takes place within their dwelling, and is indeed strictly forbidden throughout the whole area of the village. At a certain period (which seems to be instinctive to both) they go off together into the bush; leaving in the morning they return at night, and regularly once a year the woman bears a child. When the time for this event approaches she leaves her home and goes quite alone into the jungle, taking nothing with her—apparently not even food. She returns in a day or two, carrying the infant in her arms. Neither parent takes the slightest notice of it—they seem quite unconcerned whether it lives or dies.

The women feed their children at the breast up to the age of about six. I have seen many of them suckle in



AUTHOR AMONG THE CHUCUNAQUE (p. 161).
Note Mongol type.



MR. MITCHELL HEDGES WITH THE CHUCUNAQUE (p. 156).

turn children of various ages. They reminded me very much of the way the lambs at home suddenly run up to the mother, pull at the teat and then return to their play. Of course the primitive Solomon Islanders and other races are analogous to this, for they not only suckle their children long after they can run about, but also their puppies and little pigs, though taking far greater care of the latter, as being of more value than babies.

Like the women of the San Blas Indians, their stomachs were enormously distended, while the breasts of a middle-aged woman, after she has borne numerous children, were enormous in size. With the exception of a score or so, none seemed to be above the age of forty. I think one can safely assert that under the most favourable conditions they are not a long-lived race.

CHAPTER IV

DEATH: THE SOLEMN RITUAL AND WAILING CEREMONY OF FAREWELL—WE ARE CREATED CHIEFS OF THE SAN BLAS

THE death of an Indian is always attended with a solemn ritual which is most impressive and mournful to a degree. I could not help contrasting the beautiful simplicity of this service with some I have seen in civilised countries, the monetary show and display of the latter comparing very unfavourably with that of the Indians.

The head contoolie, who always leads in everything, arranges a gathering of the whole village, his dress on this occasion being quite different from that worn at a marriage or other feast. The head is bare, his bone necklaces discarded—he is clad in his long garment covered with hieroglyphics of mystic import, and round his neck he wears a beautiful collar of yellow feathers, graduating from small where it is fastened at the back to large in the centre. In each hand he carries a reed wand 18 inches long surmounted by a tiny bunch of the same coloured feathers, many fearsome-looking objects being suspended from a girdle round his waist.

The faces of both sexes are painted, the cheeks red, with a black streak down the nose, and round their necks they wear every heirloom they possess—vast quantities of necklaces of various teeth, children's finger bones, and the long, curved, orange-coloured teeth of a species of large water-rat. The immediate relatives wear necklaces of sweet wood, which give off a pungent scent.

The body, which up to this period had been lying in the hammock in which death took place, was wrapped in banana leaves, whereupon a mournful wail rose on the air, making my flesh creep. The wailing continued without a break for five minutes, rising on a high quivering cadence, falling back and ending on a low-toned throbbing note. An incantation by the contoolie followed. The relatives shed no tears. I am certain death held no terrors for them, but was looked on as an event which must come to all and merely a transitory phase. When this part of the ceremony was over the hammock was removed and slowly borne some considerable distance by the relatives into the bush, where several enormous grave houses of bamboo and thatch were built. The same ritual was repeated here, but this time it lasted longer, and continued while a shallow hole was being dug for the corpse. Into this it was placed, lying in the hammock, facing upwards. A bamboo stick was then held upright from the mouth of the dead Indian, the earth replaced until level with the ground, with the stick protruding above the surface. This was afterwards withdrawn, leaving a hole from the top to the mouth of the corpse beneath. A long piece of vine, or a string of vegetable fibre was then pushed down the space left by the withdrawal of the bamboo stick and carried to the top of the dwelling out through the thatch roof, whereupon a great wailing of farewell took place, ending in a stentorian shout given simultaneously by all the Indians; the earthenware pots and (when as in this case the corpse was that of a male) his weapons, and in fact all that he possessed, were placed on top of the grave, together with the stool used during life. The contoolie and an old hag meanwhile intoned monotonously again and again three words, after which the Indians silently departed.

Their religious belief is simplicity itself, and their faith is really very beautiful. They believe that when

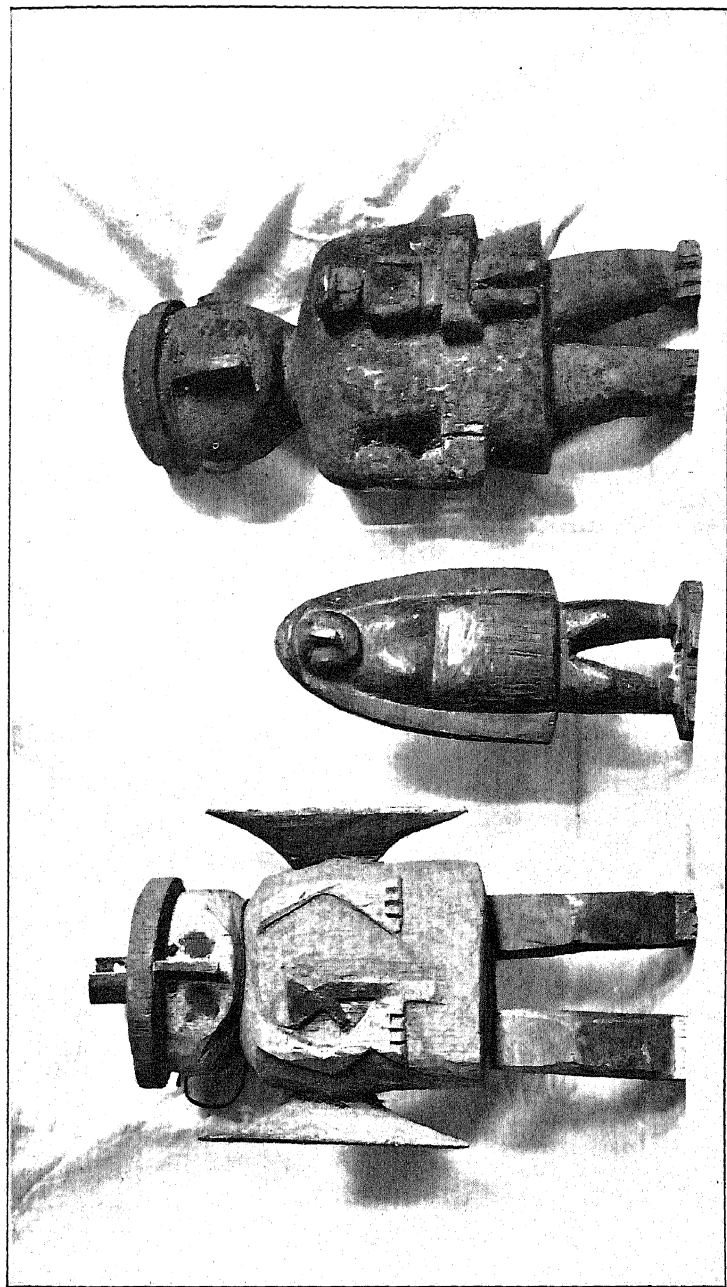
night comes the spirit of the dead person creeps up the vine and makes its way to a river where a cayuca (dug-out) in which another spirit is seated awaits it. It enters, and is conducted to where the river branches into a number of streams, at the juncture of which a great spirit stands to indicate which water-way it must take. The journey is continued in the dug-out for some time longer, when the spirit of the dead Indian arrives at a celestial village—the Valhalla of the Chucunaque dead.

It is strange how a river seems to figure after death in most religions and in mythology ; and to-day the large number of followers of spiritualism may be surprised to hear that there are many people in the world who, entirely cut off from all outside communication, yet have an analogous belief. The Chucunaque Indians, for example, have the fixed idea that the spirits of the dead return to the grave houses wherein they are buried, sit on their stools conversing with one another, coming and going at will, and that their grave house is in effect a meeting place for the spirits of the departed.

Their religious belief also embraces a personal god. By this I mean that each family has its own deity, fashioned exclusively from wood. The carving is done by the simple expedient of charring, afterwards scraping and cutting with the teeth of shark and other animals. Again I saw no evidences of any stone or metal.

The dress of one of their gods was carved to represent that of an old Spanish Conquistadore. This was further confirmation that in some way they had either seen or come in touch with the Spaniards when they first landed in Central America ; Nombre de Dios, for example, cannot be more than 200 miles away, as the crow flies.

These wooden fetishes were a great curiosity, inasmuch as no two were alike. Among the strange forms in which they were carved was a winged figure, and rising from its head two other smaller figures, also winged.



WOODEN GODS OF THE CHUCUNAQUE, FASHIONED BY CHARRING AND SCRAPING (p. 160).
Now in the British Museum.

Several were carved to represent a man wearing a top hat and frock-coat, and I again wondered, as I had done when I saw other Indian gods dressed in a similar fashion, how they could have got this idea if they had never seen a white person before.

I read in the *Daily Mail* recently that the Chinese of the fifteenth century wore a top hat, and the illustration, which appeared in the same paper, resembled closely the head-gear of certain of the gods of the Chucunaque. It is impossible for any human being to have visited their territory dressed in such a fashion. I think one can discard the theory that they had seen any picture they could copy, and in any case the style depicted was long before photographs or pictorial papers were thought of. Again we are faced with the mystery that lies within this strange country and people.

During our sojourn among them they gave us an enormous number of presents which, although they meant nothing to them, were of the greatest value to us. We had not bothered much about the ever-growing pile in our dwelling, but got quite a shock when we came to try and pack it. It was only then we realised what a task it would be to get everything back to the coast.

Our leave-taking from the Indians was a sad one. In their minds was a certainty that we would return, and in this they may not be wrong. The entire village turned out, and we got several photographs. One shows the two-headed god. Midge prevailed on me to put on my white dress, and in it I was photographed, holding the Chief's daughter by the hand. The children were brought so that I might pat them, the mothers all touching me in a hesitating way, as if afraid of their temerity, but evidently in the belief that this would cast a good spell on them and keep away the evil spirits.

They followed us to the edge of the village, and—as if I was not feeling miserable enough—to my utter consternation I heard the awful wail of the death ceremony

rise on the air. Now, I am rather superstitious, and Midge, knowing this, watched me covertly to see how I would take it. No doubt my face showed what I felt, for he said :

" Cheer up ! We're the departing spirits, and as we're leaving this people, I suppose it's the greatest honour they could possibly offer us."

The Chief having detailed certain of the Indians to escort us, they loaded up with the huge collection, and we started on our journey to the coast. This was accomplished without incident, but their dug-outs had to return three times in order to carry the collection to the yacht, and when all was on board there was not much room left for us. As our boat got under way the Indians, standing in their cayucas, made a curious sign, the meaning of which I am still at a loss to understand. They performed a semi-circle three times in succession, with their finger pointing towards the sky, and then slowly stretched themselves flat in their little dug-outs, remaining in this position until lost to view.

On our return to Allegandee the Indians appeared overjoyed to see us. Royalty could not have had a better or more imposing reception. The women crowded round me holding up their children, and we were overwhelmed with the number of extraordinary presents that were lavished on us, some of which were really a source of embarrassment. For example, they presented us with a life-size wooden god. It was impossible to refuse it, and two men were required to carry it down to the dinghy and thence to the yacht. Another astonishing gift was two live lizards with their feet carefully tied to prevent their escaping or doing any damage. Later on I shall relate what we did with the lizards. As for fruit—I think we had enough bunches of plantains, bananas, etc., to have lasted us for months had we been able to keep them. Somehow or other we had to



AUTHOR WITH DAUGHTER OF CHUCUNAQUE CHIEF (p. 161).



AUTHOR HOLDING GOD OF THE CHUCUNAQUE (p. 162).

crowd all this collection on the yacht, for had we refused they would not have understood.

As before, a tremendous gathering took place in the Chief's hut, our old friend San Coman, the Sagala, being delighted to see us again. The simple medicines with which we had doctored them before leaving for the Chucunaque had performed miracles in many cases. Of course it was natural that bad cuts and festering sores would heal when thoroughly cleansed and dressed, but the way the itch had yielded to treatment was extraordinary. The Chief's daughter and children, whom we had previously treated, were well on the way to recovery, and an opening being made for her between the solid jam of people inside the great house, she solemnly walked up and presented me with an enormous wooden image carved in the shape of a woman, while the Chief gave Midge his own stick of office, undoubtedly his most-prized possession. We were acclaimed as the good spirits, and they, like the Chucunaque Indians on the mainland, were almost desperate in their entreaties that we would remain with them for ever.

Outside the women had evidently been congregating, for at the door of the dwelling we could hear a tremendous altercation taking place between them and the men. Finally a couple of male Indians seemed to accede to their demands, and worked their way through the crowd to the Sagala, when they commenced discussing with him and his head-men what was apparently a matter of importance. I could not quite understand what they were saying, but having caught the drift of the conversation, had a shrewd suspicion, and when I asked Midge if he knew what they were talking about, by his airy "Nothing much!" my suspicions became a conviction that it was something in which I was chiefly concerned.

San Coman now addressed me direct, telling me that the women had prayed that I would see them, as they

had a request to make, giving me to understand that it was a matter in which my companion had no part.

I went outside to find every woman on the island assembled. The Chief's daughter, supported by six others, was spokeswoman on behalf of the female population. After much hesitation they walked close up to me and one by one solemnly stroked my nose, downwards with one finger.

I was wearing an ordinary thin cotton dress ; remembering how terrible had been the heat inside the Chief's house at the first great meeting, I had risked not wearing my boots and breeches, in which garb I had previously found the already stifling atmosphere insufferable. Had they stopped at stroking my nose I should not have minded much, but their next proceeding filled me with amazement and embarrassment, for they lowered the top of my dress and each in turn placed a finger on my breasts in the same gentle manner as they had touched my nose.

After this the Chief's daughter asked me very humbly if I would loosen my hair for all to see, following this by the singular request that when they met me in the spirit world from which I came they might all have hair, noses, and breasts like mine.

What could I, or any other person, do or say under such circumstances ? There was something so touchingly beautiful in their simplicity that I would have given anything to have been able to do as they asked.

Had I raised false hopes ? Was it wrong to bring happiness—earthly, it is true—to these children of nature ? Placed in such an extremely difficult position, how could anyone have answered except as I did—in the affirmative ?

My re-entry to the Chief's dwelling signalled the commencement of a festival. The island was given up to general rejoicings in celebration of our return. Eight men began to play their extraordinary reed instruments,

the wailing notes sounding fearful and wonderful, hemmed in as we were. A place was forced in the centre, when the contoolie commenced a weird dance. The head-men joined them, the Chief himself beginning to sway. It infected the whole concourse of people. The excitement spreading rapidly, we could now hear the roar of the multitude outside joining in, and within a short time a mad spirit of revelry possessed the entire population. The "great house" cleared, everybody going outside into the open space in the centre of the village. Here we were seated beside the Chief, and I witnessed the most amazing dance I suppose a white woman has ever seen. Armed with calabash rattles, accompanied by the wail of the reed pipes and by the sound of what can best be described as tom-toms (they were simply oblong rounded sections of coco-nut trees) on which an incessant rhythmic beating with two sticks took place, the male and female Indians advanced in large groups towards one another, then retreated, all the time performing a curious shuffling motion, much the same as in the Chucunaque. The men, in violent contrast with their usual stoicism, worked up to a pitch of the greatest excitement, commenced to emit shrill noises, to be presently joined by the women, the mantle of their reserve having completely fallen from them.

The noise grew louder and louder. Presently with a roar the combined population swept towards us, and it seemed as if a signal had been given, for every hand shot out, and the thunderous shout which accompanied this action shook the air. This happened again and again—to be followed by an unexpected stillness.

The contoolie then advanced to the centre. They were decorated with bones, monkey skulls, jaws of small animals, all strung together, clicking monotonously to the rhythm of their weird dance.

Darkness fell, but still the remarkable display continued. A gigantic fire was lit, the flames rushing

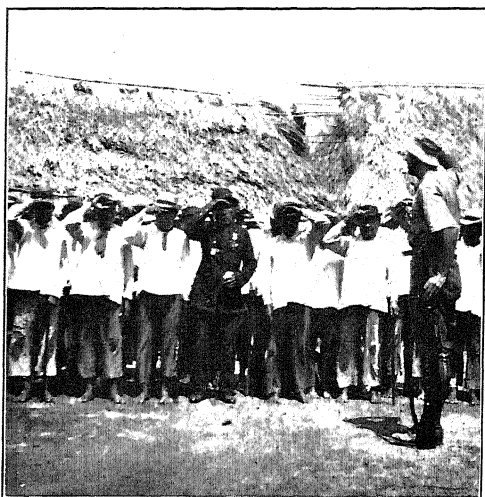
thirty feet into the air, and in the lurid light of the tongues of fire the whole scene might have come out of Grimm's Fairy-tales.

The dances continued until the middle of the night. Sometimes the men alone took part, while occasionally the women gave a separate exhibition, only ceasing when all were utterly exhausted.

In the early morning when we were fast asleep on board the *Cara* a number of cayucas coming alongside roused us. We soon saw that a fresh excitement awaited us. Three large cayucas had arrived, having come a long way down the coast from Colombia. The news of our advent had reached the long-haired Colombian Indians, and their Chief had sent his son and head-men to convey his greeting and bid us welcome to his country.

We went ashore, Midge in his breeches and boots, and carrying his rifle. I was dressed in the same way, and both of us carried guns in our belts. Directly we landed a sort of guard of honour surrounded us, Midge's rifle being carried by one of the San Blas Indians, who held it carefully out in front of him, the barrel pointing upwards. When we arrived at the space in the middle of the village I uttered an involuntary ejaculation of surprise. In some mysterious way San Coman had obtained an old Colombian general's uniform and a bowler hat. On his immediate right sat the son of the long-haired Colombian Indian Chief, whilst his head-men and contoolie also supported him. The rest of the Indians were drawn up in lines in military formation. Midge's gun-bearer advanced solemnly slightly in front of him. There was dead silence for a minute, when the right hand of the regiment shot into the air, with a roar of "Sagala Tumati !"

We answered them, both saluting, and before the whole assemblage we were created Chiefs of the San Blas. It was impossible for us to hold any conversation with the Colombian Indians ; they spoke an entirely different



INDIANS SALUTING M. AS SAGALA TUMATI (p. 166).



SAN COMAN IN OLD COLOMBIAN UNIFORM (p. 166).

language from that of the San Blas. Even the latter were unable to converse with them, but among these primitive people much can be accomplished by signs.

The Chief's son gave us some wonderful necklaces, and three small gold images in the form of toads.

The Colombian Indians were considerably taller than the San Blas, paler in colour, hair jet black and very thick, growing to the shoulder. No ornaments were worn apart from teeth necklaces. They are a fine-looking race of men, but it was impossible to get away from the fact that in some indefinable way traces of what can only be described as Mongol extraction were quite evident. We spent three days at Allegandee, again doctoring the people. I had the greatest difficulty in getting Midge to leave, but could not wonder at it in a way, for these simple people had conceived such an affection for us (which I must frankly confess we reciprocated) that I am quite sure he would have spent many months among them and been perfectly happy. When I said we really ought to stay no longer, he got quite huffy about it.

"What's the hurry?" he enquired. "Are you longing for the blatant rush of civilisation? Where could you get the peace that we are enjoying here? The people worship us; we're lords of all we survey."

I realised there was a lot of truth in this, but that is where a woman is different from a man. There are intangible things she misses. I appreciate, and have experienced, the call of the wilds, but there comes a moment when the call of such unconsidered trifles as hot baths—which at home we look on as an essential part of our life—is stronger. A certain type of man will never understand this, and funnily enough, the average woman does not seem particularly attracted to those who do. I suppose that is why our sex is called inconsistent, but do we, or do we not prefer the red-blooded man? I wonder.

I prevailed in the end ; but saying farewell to these wonderful people brought a great lump to my throat ; I shall never forget it—how every cayuca on the island was filled with people, and the numbers that could not find room in the dug-outs lined the shore, both men and women, the latter carrying the tiniest babies, wading waist-deep into the sea. Our flag fluttered in the breeze, the anchor was hauled up, the engine chugged, and as we glided away their pathetic cry of farewell haunted us for hours, and my last sight of them was through a veil of tears.

Time and again I have shut my eyes and revisualised it with an ever-recurring choking sensation. It is the dearest ambition of my life to return. Could I ever undertake the hardships, which I now know have to be endured ? The call is very strong.

We were both silent for a long time, and when Robbie announced that food was ready, it was no use—neither of us could eat a morsel.

“ Don’t let’s go straight back,” said Midge suddenly ; “ we simply couldn’t plunge right away into modern life after the beautiful simplicity of these people. Let’s try and find the group of islands the Indians told us about.”

I was so upset I would have agreed to anything, and silently nodded my head.

“ Good ! ” he answered, and as he said the word the bow of the yacht swung north.

“ Heaven knows where they are,” he went on, “ but they must be out here somewhere, and if we head in this direction we ought to sight them shortly.”

Presently a dark break on the horizon told us we were on the right track.

“ One thing’s certain,” said Midge ; “ there must be a tremendous barrier of reef out there, for do you notice there’s no swell here from the outer ocean ? ”

We made at full speed for what we could see were islands. At first they were visible only in outline, but it

was soon evident they were covered with coco-nut palms. As we drew nearer we found ourselves in an intricate maze of reefs, which it would be dangerous to attempt to pass through unless the sun was shining either behind us or directly overhead. As it was approaching the west, we decided to drop anchor for the night under the lee of a tiny inner islet separated from the larger outer islands by a network of reef and channel.

We went ashore and, as the place was quite free from mosquitoes, made up our minds to sling our hammocks and spend the night amid the cool ocean breezes.

After darkness had fallen, every now and again, breaking the silence, we heard strange splashing noises, some of which appeared to come from near the beach. At last curiosity got the better of us, so fetching an electric torch from the yacht, we strolled along the edge of the sand, when the noises we had heard were at once explained.

CHAPTER V

THE TERRIFYING MALEVOLENCE OF THE SILENCE— CUT OFF FROM THE WORLD

THE island we were on was evidently the nocturnal home of a number of the hawk's-bill turtle ; we could have killed at least ten. Commercially it was very tempting, and had we stayed there a few nights we could have reaped a rich harvest from the shell procurable, but we left them alone to continue their busy occupation of laying eggs.

On our return to the yacht in the morning we saw we were not the only inhabitants of that peaceful stretch of water, for ever circling round the yacht were several ominous-looking dorsal fins. We would have tried to rid the ocean of a few more of the pests had we not been anxious to get on. We decided the wisest policy was to make straight off and commence the hazardous business of threading the reefs to reach the outer islands while the light was right. For a little way this was easy, but after crossing a channel about a mile in breadth it seemed impossible to go any farther. It was out of the question to attempt to go ahead under our own power, but at last we solved the difficulty by Robbie getting into the dinghy, rowing in front of our bow, and sounding continuously with the lead, while we crept along dead slow, following the course he directed us to take.

We navigated tiny openings where it seemed as if the coral reefs grazed our sides, but ever continuing these tortuous passages for a couple of hours, we found ourselves in a broad lagoon with a perfect sandy bottom,

where the depth of the water was not more than ten feet ; it ran the whole way up to the beach of the largest island. And this stretch of water extended right along to other islands of the group.

The first thing we did was to go ashore, and finding a long branch of mangrove tree that had been thrown up by the sea, we rowed back to where we had come in from the channel through the reef, and marked the entrance, as we had serious doubts whether, when we wanted to return, we could ever find the place again. Wrecked or stranded out here, there is no doubt we should have remained for the rest of our lives, for as far as we could see the island was totally uninhabited, and owing to the coral formations on the ocean side, it would have been impossible for any boat to call. A curious low moaning vibration sounded in our ears the whole time.

"The outer reef must be a long way out," I said, "for us to hear the roar as faintly as we do."

"We'll make everything fast," my companion replied, "and explore thoroughly; but don't let's bother about anything now—let's take it easy."

Robbie appeared in a few minutes with a steaming bowl, which smelt so good that, although I was almost past hunger, it put an edge to appetite. I fell to with zest, and between us we devoured every scrap, and even then I could have eaten more.

"I've enjoyed that more than anything we've had for a long time," I said.

Midge's face was perceptibly side-slipping.

"What are you grinning at?"

"Oh, nothing!" he said airily, but I pestered and badgered him until at last I extracted the horrible truth—we had eaten those awful lizards the Indians had given us!

"That's a good second to my rat meal," he chuckled unfeelingly. The only retort I felt well enough to make

was "Brute!"—my inside being in a state of revolt at the thought of the disgusting-looking reptiles I had helped to consume.

That night I experienced the true meaning of loneliness. When night fell the darkness enshrouded us like a pall, the stars appeared in the heavens like suspended diamonds scintillating through a velvety blackness. Not a sound broke the stillness which one seemed actually to feel, and this terrible, death-like silence was accentuated by the faint boom of the rollers on the outer reef. The stygian water was transplendent with phosphorence—ghostly—sepulchral. God! it was awful! I smothered a scream—the silence was so malevolent.

I clutched Midge's arm.

"For God's sake make some noise," I whispered, almost afraid to hear my own voice. So suddenly had I grasped him that he started violently.

"Good Lord!" he said, "what's the matter? You've got an attack of nerves."

"It isn't that," I shuddered, "it's something I don't understand—something unearthly—can't you sense it?"

"I know what it is," he said practically; "you're missing the drone of the insects on the mainland and the night cries in the bush. Even the rustling of the animals in the jungle seemed to make you feel you weren't quite alone there, but here is utter solitude. You're off the map—on the edge of the world almost."

I took a desperate grip of myself.

"I felt as if I were sinking—down—down—I knew not where; a horrible fear had taken fast hold of me."

"Buck up!" he said, "let's see if a little light won't alter things."

The light was very feeble; it consisted of two candles stuck in the necks of bottles, but never was I more grateful for their friendly gleam.

"I think," I said, "if I were left on one of these islands for a day or two I'd go raving mad."

" You'll feel different to-morrow when you become engrossed in seeing what these mysterious places can show you. There's no doubt these are the Kaymaals of which the Indians have so often spoken, and I now quite understand why they're afraid to come here. Among the legends they've told me was one that evil spirits roamed at will in this desolate spot as soon as darkness fell, and that's why they're looked on with the utmost fear by the San Blas people."

I spent a terrible night, never once closing my eyes. I could not shake off that feeling of deep depression which the surroundings had evoked, and could have shouted for joy when the first faint glimmer of dawn stole through the port holes. Midge was sleeping soundly in the cock-pit, but I couldn't resist the temptation of waking him—I felt I had to talk to somebody, and together we sat on the deck and watched the sun rise out of the sea in a blaze of colour, crimsoning the varnished leaves of the coco-nut palms that completely covered the island.

" Do you know," said Midge, " though I wouldn't own it last night, I don't mind admitting now that I too had a feeling of horror such as I've never before experienced. But I wouldn't have let you see it for the world."

A grinning ebony face now showed itself through the forward hatch, and very shortly all forebodings of the previous night were dispelled by steaming coffee and breakfast.

Without wasting any time, after looking right and left and seeing no signs of shark, we slipped overboard, swam the few yards to the beach, and clad only in our bathing costumes walked along to the north-eastern extremity of the island. We were so hardened to the rays of the tropical sun that we did not suffer in the least from sunburn or the lack of headgear.

Arriving at the end of the island we found a channel, which by the royal-blue colour of the water we knew

was very deep, separating the one we were on from a smaller one, while peeping out behind, making a beautiful miniature picture in comparison with the vastness of our surroundings, was another tiny island such as one sees in the centre of an ornamental lake, except that it too was covered with graceful coco-nut palms.

"We must try and bring the yacht round here," Midge said; "I think we could easily work it into this deep channel and explore those other islands."

Walking round the end to the side which faced the ocean, the reason for the faint moaning we continually heard was apparent. Stretching away to where the great rollers boomed on the outer reef was a shallow sandy plateau with a foundation of solid coral extending for nearly a mile. This was intersected by several waterways, like canals, through which the force of the mighty seas beyond drove a running stream of water, the rest of the flats being covered to a depth of 12 to 18 inches. As far as we could see the whole length of land on which we stood, facing seawards, was clothed in dense mangroves, which as usual were growing out beyond the sandy shore into the warm water. These mangroves were evidently the metropolis of a colony of egrets, thousands of these beautiful white birds dotting the trees where they rested, and flying overhead, while many were wading about fishing. It was most interesting to see their heads dip into the water, the momentary flash of a tiny silver fish in their bills telling of success. It was a pleasure to me to think it would be many a long year before they could be exterminated by ruthless hunters, and that indeed they might never be disturbed.

"I'd love to wade out to the very edge of the reef," I said; "it would be a wonderful experience to stand close and watch the giant waves breaking into the air."

These sandy flats were the home—I should think the breeding place—of innumerable conchs; they were so

thickly distributed in places that we had to pick our way in between them. They were of all sizes, many so enormous they weighed pounds, and ranged down to quite tiny specimens. The mollusc that lives within is really too curious to be described. A number of the shells were empty, for which I could see no apparent reason, and later we collected a large quantity of the finest, laboriously bringing them back to the yacht with an idea of using them to decorate a big open fireplace at home. Apart from these there were many other different species intermingled, and a few queen shells, which when held up to the sun resembled tortoiseshell.

On the edge of the reef the sea was indeed a wonderful sight. The plateau terminated abruptly, dropping sheer down into the depths of the ocean. There was no shallow ground for the rollers to expend their first force on, and in the full majesty of their relentless strength it was just like the boom of mighty guns as they curled and broke on this great barrier, bursting into the air, shattering into glistening miniature cascades as they fell back. We here witnessed a remarkable natural phenomenon. There must have been some subterranean tunnels beneath the coral on which we stood, for on each roller breaking in, a jet of water and fine spray like steam was forced out of natural geysers, some of them quite 200 feet inshore from the surf. As with a rushing noise the spouting stream jetted into the air, the sun shining through made a beautiful spectacle. We were able to stand quite close to the geysers—actually on the very edge and could hear the gurgling of the water underneath before the torrent shot upwards, in some instances as high as 50 feet.

We spent the whole of the first day roaming about these flats, and well it was that I had got over my terror of the night before, for as darkness fell the heavens were ablaze with lightning from a tropical storm which raged on the mainland, making the place more demoniacal

than ever. I was dead tired and slept soundly until after sunrise the next morning. Midge greeted me with the one word :

"Fish!"

"Fish what?" I said sleepily.

"To eat," he answered. "We'll take our rods and work round in the dinghy to that large pool we saw where one of the channels from the outer reef ran in."

"Do you really think we shall get any fish there?" I asked him.

"As certain as you and I are here it'll be full of them. I bet you that within an hour we'll get more than we can eat."

We got there with some difficulty, and moored where the strong flow of water entered from the sea. We fished with light tackle, our bait consisting of a piece of corned beef. No sooner had we got our first fish—a matter of a few minutes—than it was killed and cut up for bait. The sport we had was surprising, as were the colours and variety of the fish. The inhabitants which were most abundant in the pool were scarlet with deep red eyes, the dorsal fin being even sharper than that of perch; my hands were pierced several times in taking them off the hook. Another species, long and eel-like, ranged in colour from a beautiful green to pale yellow with turquoise-blue eyes. Others were striped like zebras, while one little fellow we got was jet black, with a broad amber stripe across the centre of the body and a short deep orange tail. We must have caught two dozen in three-quarters of an hour before Midge struck and landed a small shark,¹ and then felt we had earned a rest after the blazing heat which beat down on us, so pulling the dinghy up on the sand we lay about for some time in the clear warm water.

We presently made up our minds to walk a little way round this part of the island, but had hardly started

¹ A full description of the capture is given in *Battles with Giant Fish*.

along the shore before we were covered with sand flies, which appeared in thousands, their attack driving us into the sea. Even there they followed us, so that we had to keep ducking our heads beneath the surface to drive them off.

"Heavens," I cried, "this is more than I can stand—push the dinghy off and let's get away from this evil place!"

Midge for a wonder didn't squash the suggestion.

As we were returning to the yacht we saw in the shallow water underneath us a large turtle which scuttled off at once. We pulled hard after it. The creature had stopped, but as soon as we got close away it went again. For the fun of the thing we tried to drive it in towards the beach, but it was far too wise for that, and our interest soon palled in the intense heat.

In the afternoon we explored the island, but it consisted of nothing but a forest of coco-nut trees with dense mangroves on the side farthest from the mainland; so next morning we slowly worked the yacht into the deep channel we had seen previously, which ran between this and the two little islands beyond. We started to fish and had some grand sport. Within an hour we had caught a red snapper weighing nearly 50 pounds and some jack up to 45 pounds. The latter were different from those we had caught in Jamaica, their backs being almost peacock-blue, and their appearance altogether more handsome.

We landed on the two little islands, but not a sign of life did they contain, with the exception of a large sea-eagle, which flew out from the coco-nut trees shrieking horribly. Later, standing on the shore, we were interested to watch how this bird catches its prey. Unlike the pelican and certain other sea birds, which dive from a considerable height and seize the fish in their beaks just below the surface, this bird hovers in the air and drops plummet-like straight down, feet first,

seizing the fish in the immensely strong leg talons, flying away with it suspended in this manner, to consume it at its leisure in the palm-tree tops.

On the seaward side of one of these small islands we were much amused to watch a hawk's-bill turtle in a shallow pool of water making desperate efforts to escape as soon as we approached. It must have come in there overnight and remained; as there had previously never been a disturbing element, no doubt it fancied itself quite safe, and it must have been intensely surprised to see two strange forms watching it. We stood there and laughed at the way it went round and round the little pool.

There was not much else of interest. We collected a few more conch shells, and made our way back to the yacht determined to continue our journey next day, but to do so it was essential to navigate again the tortuous channel through which we had come. This we safely accomplished.

We seemed to have struck the north-eastern extremity of the Kaymaals and saw more islands west-south-west, in which direction lay Colon. As they were on our way, we determined to visit them. They did not present the same difficulty of approach as did the first, and in the late afternoon we ran in between two of them, anchoring in comparatively deep water.

CHAPTER VI

A DESPERATE GAMBLE TO SAVE THE YACHT—BUSHED : THE COMEDY OF THE COCO-NUTS

AFTER the anchor had dropped we looked over the side and found that the bed of the ocean presented a wonderful spectacle. Giant sea-weed growing in between huge coral boulders rose like trees from the bottom. It was a veritable marine forest. Not a ripple disturbed the surface, so that we had a perfect view. In and out between the corals and sea-weed swam fish of curious shapes and every imaginable colour. We were soon busy with our rods and again had splendid sport, catching quantities of various species of fish that I have never seen before or since.

Whilst engrossed with our fishing we saw the fish suddenly shoot off in every direction, when into full view swam a long, sinister shape—the ever-present shark. Baiting with one of the fish we had caught, we ran out our shark lines, and within five minutes were in the throes of a big battle. We landed it safely and found it weighed 600 pounds.

It is a funny thing that whenever one hooks a shark others seem attracted to the vicinity, and after we had secured this brute we saw quite a number beneath the yacht, which put an end to our fishing, for it was a certainty that if smaller fish were silly enough to come there and take the bait, they would be seized before we could bring them to the surface, entailing the loss of hook, lead, and probably much line.

Some beautiful coral grew close in to the shore of one

of the islands off which we had moored, and I collected many remarkable specimens, totally unlike any I had previously seen. It was tree-like in form, with spreading branches, and without much stretch of the imagination we could trace miniature flowers.

I rather wondered that throughout the whole of the San Blas Archipelago, and also at the Kaymaals, we never once found oysters, nor traces of them. Had there been any, empty shells would have been strewn on the sand, as is always the case wherever oysters occur; but I got several gigantic clam shells, some spanning 10 inches across.

After visiting the whole of the Kaymaals, approximately eleven islands in all, we made for El Porvenir, and having gone through an awful piece of water, almost immediately ran into trouble caused by a momentary relaxation of vigilance. It was such a relief to feel the boat propelled on an even keel through dead calm water, but in the midst of congratulating ourselves that it was all over, the yacht ran on something soft and came to a sudden standstill. We had run into a yielding bank of sand.

It did not appear to be serious at the moment, but soon the gravity of our position was forcibly driven home. The engine was reversed, but it was useless—not an inch did we budge.

Again we tried, and this time had the added help of a rope on the stern capstan tied to the dinghy, John George and Robbie pulling as hard as they could. It was utterly useless—we were fast aground.

Midge's face was a study, and I knew instinctively what he was thinking. Having gone through what we had, got our huge collection down to the coast and safely stowed on board, it was heartbreaking to have our hopes dashed to the ground in this way, owing to an insignificant sand-bar—and, apart from this, our position out here was desperate. A return to the Kaymaals in the

dinghy through the awful channel we had just passed was to court death ; miles ahead lay El Porvenir, and it was obvious that unless we could get the yacht afloat, she would be irrevocably lost, as would the whole collection of gods, picture-cloth, and other curios on board. Help was out of the question, as we were quite isolated. We tried everything we could think of—without avail. Sizzling in the blazing sun, perspiration pouring down us, and so consumed with thirst that every few minutes we had recourse to the water barrel lashed on the stern of the yacht, we passed a very bad day indeed, and as the sun dropped behind the distant towering hills of the mainland, no solution could we see. We spent the hours till morning cudgelling our brains what was best to be done.

" Little pal," said Midge suddenly to me, " we're up against it—there's just one chance, but if it fails I don't like to think of the consequences. Are you game for the gamble ? "

" I'm game for anything," I answered, " rather than lose all without making an effort. You think there's a chance of getting the boat off ? "

" Just one," he replied, " and that's to scrap the big cask of water on the end and so lighten us, but if that fails, God help us. We must fill the empty petrol tins and everything else that will hold water, and put them in the dinghy. But don't decide in a hurry—think it over for a bit."

" There's no need to think," I said ; " we'll do it."

They filled everything they could with the precious liquid, cut the lashings of the cask, and overboard it went, but I had cold shivers when I saw it go. The petrol stored for'ard was then moved to the stern, we started the engine and hoped for the best—but *the yacht did not move an inch.*

We stared at one another blankly, when suddenly there flashed into my mind the memory of a picture I

had seen in the *Illustrated London News* some time before, representing natives standing in the water almost up to their shoulders, forcing themselves against the boat that the Duke of Sutherland had gone up the Nile in when on his shooting expedition. Having grounded on a mud bank, it was being rocked off in this way. I hurriedly explained the idea.

"We can but try it," said Midge; "we'll start up again; you take the wheel while we three get into the water and heave for all we're worth. When I shout 'Go!' throw the control in."

"Go!" came from underneath. I threw in the control. The motor chugged manfully—the yacht jarred and then rocked slightly—a mis-fire down below and the engine stopped; Robbie clambered aboard and started it up again. I could feel the yacht quivering.

"It's moving!" I yelled in my excitement.

Inch by inch we crept astern—at first barely perceptibly, then smoothly we slid off the bank.

I had to help all three on board; they were utterly exhausted after the almost superhuman effort of heaving and straining with their shoulders against the boat. Midge had inches of skin torn off, and Robbie complained of a rick in his back.

Our first thought was to recover the barrel, which had not sunk but was bobbing in the sea a few yards away. We hauled it on board, emptied it and lashed it back in its old position, pulled the dinghy alongside, and carefully removed the water we had stowed in it.

"I think we can risk a good drink now," said Midge; "we'll run into the mouth of one of the rivers on the mainland and fill up the barrel again."

What a relief! We had gambled with life in uncharted seas and won, but I have often wondered what would have happened if we had not got off that sand-bar. Quite possibly this book would never have been written.

We arrived at El Porvenir to find the weather outside the reef so frightful that it would have been madness to attempt the journey.

"It's no use taking unnecessary risks," I said to Midge; "let's be warned by our last experience."

We therefore ran round the back of one of the islands, and found a good anchorage close to the mainland.

The next day was, if possible, worse, blowing great guns, as usual from the north-east, and I found time hang rather heavily after our recent excitements. I had become restless, so we determined to explore the jungle, which looked quite primeval stretching away inland. We rowed across, but it was very difficult to find a landing owing to the dense mangroves which fringed the water's edge. At last we were able to force our way through, to come immediately on a flat swamp, steaming, marshy, and fairly distilling miasma. It was obvious that we would have to cross this, so we made the best of a bad job and started, slushing nearly over our top-boots at every step we took in the reeking, oozy, decaying mass of vegetation. The smell was horrible, and several times we saw hideous snakes go slithering through the slime. I could not resist the temptation of firing with my shot-gun at a loathsome-looking, flat-headed, black reptile, so unexpectedly that Midge nearly dropped his rifle, but he only said, characteristically, "Good!"

How I hate snakes!

That swamp must have been 400 yards across, and what with the heat and the heavy walking, we were both done up when we reached solid ground the other side. The bush was so dense it seemed impossible to penetrate it; we carefully marked the trail every few yards, and managed to force our way in, hoping to reach more open space.

The flowers were gorgeous—it is impossible to describe them, but owing to the density of the surroundings we

could not get photographs, though I had my camera slung across my back.

At first the ground rose slightly, but soon dropped into a gully where most wonderful ferns grew in profusion, and after crossing this and climbing up the other side, we were again engulfed in an interminable maze of verdure, but for once Midge's eyes were at fault. I saw a movement and fired instantly—there was a rustling overhead—a large snake hung wriggling suspended by its tail, then fell with a flop among the vegetation.

"My God!" cried Midge, "I missed seeing it—that's one up to you."

"I'm going to have a look at it," I said, "to see what it's like."

"For heaven's sake be careful," he answered; "remember it wasn't dead."

We forced our way to the place where it had fallen, using the utmost care, but I'd killed it all right—an awful-looking creature 9 feet long.

"I don't like this," I said; "I don't think we'll go any farther; let's turn back."

Some low coco-nut trees were growing close to where we were standing, with enormous nuts hanging within reach, looking very tempting. I made the silly suggestion that we should take a few back to the yacht. Evidently without realising their weight Midge slashed with his machete, and down in a bunch came six of the largest. The small nuts one sees at village fairs stuck on sticks, a penny a shy, give no idea of what a coco-nut in its natural state is really like. It has a very large fibrous outer covering, the whole weighing several pounds. The instant we picked them up I realised how ridiculous my suggestion was, but, nothing daunted, Midge cut down a bamboo stick. The nuts do not grow singly, but are joined together by a fibre, so he had a great idea that if we hung them across the bamboo pole we could each take an end on our shoulders and

in this way carry them back. We hoisted them up, and I struggled valiantly for about half a dozen steps, the difference in our height throwing all the weight on my shoulder, the nuts slithering down the pole until they rested against my back. What with the weight of a gun, camera, and top boots, this additional burden was the last straw that broke the camel's back, but I was revenged—as I sank down beneath the weight, I decided that he alone should carry the nuts, but I don't know that I really scored in this, as he planted me with his rifle.

We began the return journey, he swearing and cursing for all he was worth.

"Damn the nuts!" he at last exploded; "I can't see for the sweat in my eyes, the skeeters are biting my nose like hell, and I haven't a free hand to scratch with!"

Then as a climax we discovered we had lost the trail.

This may sound a small matter to the uninitiated, but as a matter of fact we were in a most serious predicament. In an impenetrable jungle, north, south, east, and west seem all alike—every bush and every tree identical. It would have been idiotic to attempt to go on, as we should have been finally bushed for a certainty, which in a country like this would mean certain death. Down went the nuts, and I had to bear the brunt of the whole trouble.

It would add nothing to English literature to describe the scene that followed, and I am certain no censor would pass it, but when the storm had somewhat subsided we attempted to take our bearings.

We cautiously retraced our steps to find ourselves at the very tree from which we had cut down the fatal nuts, the sight of which provoked a fresh outburst. I was still carrying the two guns, and I feel quite certain it was sheer absent-mindedness that had made Midge pick up two of the hated nuts and cart them along, after

having dropped them in disgust. I looked at them, but let sleeping dogs lie.

In the end, more by good luck than judgment, I struck our original trail, but even then we had to go with the greatest caution till we came in sight of the mangrove swamp we had crossed previously. Absolutely exhausted we stretched ourselves out, and lay with relaxed muscles till sharp stinging stabs warned us that we were getting badly bitten, so we reluctantly rose and waded the swamp, arriving without further incident at the edge of the water, and so once more on board. It was only then that I reminded Midge that he was still holding on desperately to those two coco-nuts. We looked at each other and laughed heartily. I still have them, and every time I look at them I still chuckle.

The weather outside remained too bad to continue our journey, so next day as soon as it was light, having nothing else to do, we started to fish early, though the place looked most unlikely. We were anchored in about 8 feet of water. Baiting with small pieces of dried cod—a delicacy that Robbie and John George seemed to revel in (every time they cooked it the smell nearly made me ill)—much to my surprise we soon caught four small fish before I found I had hooked a really healthy specimen, and successfully landing it found it was a 6-pound yellow-tail.

An argument ensued. I wanted it for the pan and Midge wanted it for his shark lines. We compromised by agreeing that if we caught no more it should be eaten ; but within an hour we landed seven. Having now plenty to last us, we ran out one of our shark lines.

"What's the use of fishing here?" I asked. "We'll never get a run."

"I guess you're right," he replied, "but it's extraordinary where you do come across them. Don't forget the one we caught in the pool out in the Kaymaals—who'd ever imagine a shark would get in there?"

We had given Robbie and John George the day off, but warned them against going to the mainland, as, if they had got lost in the bush, apart from their misfortune, we should have been in a bad way ; so they had rowed off to some small islands.

We sat on the deck for a little ; nothing moved the shark lines, and presently I turned round to find myself alone, Midge having slunk off to his favourite spot in the cock-pit, and from the sounds issuing forth, there was no need to wonder what he was doing. I later fell asleep myself, to be roused by a creaking and jarring noise for all the world as if the yacht was straining at her anchor. My eyes immediately turned to where the shark line had been lying in coils on the deck ; it was no longer slack but taut as a ship's hawser straining at the capstan, which explained the creaking which had wakened me.

" Shark ! " I shouted.

No reply. It takes a 12-inch gun to rouse that man, so I rushed aft and shook him violently. He jumped up, but knew at once the reason for my excitement, and together we made for the bow of the yacht. As we felt the pull on the line, we realised what lay before us.

" Devilish bad luck," said Midge, " when we're all alone—we're into a real thumper."

It seemed as if the line would burst as the fish kept swimming in a half circle ahead of the yacht, never once relaxing the tremendous strain. It was out of the question to attempt to play it—all we could do was sit there and hope for the best.

Apparently getting tired of its struggles in that direction it now circled broadly, but all we could do was to keep the line high up along the rail of the yacht as it swam completely round the boat, until it was again tugging as hard as ever off the bow.

" If only the men were back ! " I said, " we could perhaps do something with this brute ; as it is, I'm afraid we'll have to cut the line or it may foul the propeller."

"Wait and see!" he replied.

I had never seen a fish fight like this before—the big shark at Neadupo and the large one we had caught out at the Kaymaals were child's play in comparison.

"I wish to God I could see what it is," Midge said; "but bolt back and get the rifle—believe me, we're going to need it."

We struggled and fought with that fish for over two hours before we had the slightest hope that we might land it. One thing was certain—if the line didn't burst or the hook tear away, it could not continue its struggles much longer. Momentarily it seemed to weaken, and we hauled in a little line, giving it a few turns round the capstan.

"Free the end quick!" shouted Midge, "and run round the yacht with it"; for the line was still round the boat. This was quickly done.

"Now we've got some spare to play with," he said; "tie it on tight again—haul on hard with me, and if we get in more line make turns with it round the capstan."

Suddenly the end came. We hauled the fish close to the yacht hand over hand as hard as we could, and there close alongside us in the clear water in which we were anchored was a really frightening sight. It was a wicked-looking brute and totally different from anything yet encountered.

"It's a white shark," shouted Midge. "Good job we didn't bathe here; this and the tiger-shark will attack anything."

"What are we going to do now?" I asked practically.

"You hang on," he answered, "and I'll fire a signal to the men—wish I'd thought of it before."

The reports rang out three times, and in a few minutes I was thrilled to see the dinghy being pulled towards us. I felt that the added help of Robbie and old John George should enable us to land the brute. When they came on board we were both too done up to take interest in

anything for over half an hour, but recovered quickly when a yell from Robbie told us plainer than words that the big fish was off. It was the last effort and a desperate one. We had to give line gradually until almost the end, for it pulled like fury; once or twice it looked as though we should lose it at the eleventh hour, but no—with our united efforts we gained the mastery and commenced working it slowly back to the yacht.

As it came alongside this time the top of the head and back were above the water—the rifle barked. A fountain shot into the air, drenching us with bloody spume, but even then the adjective thing was not dead—it had shot underneath the boat. In a few minutes we got it again in position for the rifle, and sent another leaden messenger crashing through its hide.

It had put up a terrific fight and been beaten, but I had no feeling of regret at ridding the sea of such a terrible monster.

We spent the rest of the day removing the vertebræ and jaws, and no matter how many years may pass, I shall fight the battle over again when I tell my rosary of memories. I rather dread the day when this will be all that is left to me, but I shall have lived to the full my crowded hour of glorious life. This has only been attained by a complete indifference to what people may say or think. To get out of the rut, one must be entirely unswayed by the opinions and comments of others. Look round and see the thousands of men and women who might have carved out a future for themselves had they not been hidebound by convention, their ideas stultified by the narrow groove in which they have been born and bred.

CHAPTER VII

WE ARE RUSHED ON BY A DEMONIAL UNSEEN FORCE—
SAFE WITH ALL ON BOARD WE REACH COLON

NEXT morning, although the sea had gone down considerably, our anchorage appealed to us so strongly that we decided to explore our surroundings a little further. There was an alluring, romantic atmosphere which attracted me strangely. Leaving the yacht we got into the dinghy, taking plenty of food and water in case of emergencies, and determined to spend the day wandering about on the tiny sandy bars in the calm water of the lagoon enclosed by the outer corallaceous barrier. While Midge pulled slowly at the oars, I trolled the bait behind. In these unknown waters one has always to be prepared for the unexpected. We had passed through a narrow passage between two islands and were just moving into deeper water when a tremendous tug came on the line. I struck, at the same time braking hard, Midge backing water. The fish went off with a rush, then came to the surface 100 yards away, shaking its head furiously and sending the foam flying.

"You're into a big barracouda," said Midge; "take it easy and we'll land him."

It is extraordinary what a fight these fish can put up, but after half an hour, well played out, he was brought alongside the dinghy, when we discovered we had not brought the gaff with us. Now, to get a large barracouda out of the water without this necessary adjunct is difficult—not to say dangerous—as the jaws are armed with formidable rows of teeth of razorlike sharpness,



THE HUT WE MADE TO SHADE US (p. 191).



WADING TO TAKE A PHOTOGRAPH (p. 191).

but after several unavailing attempts to slip his fingers underneath the gills, Midge was at last successful, and a fine specimen of the "wolf of the sea," weighing round 40 pounds lay smashing with his tail against the boards of the boat. It was completely covered in thick, strong-smelling slime, with which we were besprinkled from time to time as it spasmodically jerked.

After this excitement we drew in towards one of the small islands, and cutting down some sticks and palm tree branches nearly filled the dinghy with them, then rowed out to one of the small sand-banks. Everything on the bed of the sea showed up microscopically clear. On landing we made a sort of hut to shade us from the rays of the sun, as the full force of the blaze out there was terrific in its intensity; I would not dare venture a guess as to the temperature. The water close in round this little islet held remarkable treasures, among them a huge sponge fully two and a half feet high, a five-pointed starfish, deep orange in colour and of shell-like hardness, as well as many beautiful conch shells. Later we pulled to the outer reef, the sea being quite calm in the lee.

It is wonderful how the myriads of tiny skeletons of zoophytes construct great barriers of such strength as to withstand the giant onslaught of the roughest seas, and watching the huge combers as they curled and broke, it struck me more forcibly than ever.

A little farther off lay another small island with a few palm trees growing on it, and when we landed I felt it must have been a blue lagoon like this that gave De Vere Stacpoole the inspiration for his book—but this was the Spanish Main, and the colouring of the ocean, the white line of surf on the outer reef, the mystic impenetrable mainland behind, had for me a lure as strong as the gold had for the buccaneers of old.

My recent longings for a hot bath and the flesh-pots of Egypt fast evaporated as I basked in contentment

in a foot or two of warm, limpid water, drugged by the exotic beauty of this tropical paradise.

My reverie was shattered by the prosaic announcement of food. In my dreamy state the thought was repugnant to me, but I joined Midge, who had lit a fire and made some tea.

The afternoon waned; as we rowed back the wind changed round, blowing coolly from the mountains. Languorously stretched out on the yacht's deck I watched the sun's fiery rim touch the hills, whilst at its scorching breath in my imagination the jungle advanced and greedily devoured it. The nocturnal life of the wilds awoke; on the stillness rose the thin whistle of the sloth to its mate; a wild hog's discordant squeal, followed by the purring rumble of a jaguar told its own story: the soft miaul of the tiger cats and ocelots formed a lullaby, and as I drifted into dreamland, intoxicated with the sensuous scented atmosphere, I knew the Tropics had for ever claimed me as their own.

"We'll have to be getting on," was Midge's greeting next morning. I sighed, hating the thought of being torn away so soon, for I could have stayed on here for two or three weeks revelling in an ecstasy of primitive emotion.

As we drew near the break in the reef we found the sea was much rougher than the day before. I hesitatingly made the suggestion that we had better not risk it.

"We've never turned back yet," was the reply, "and we're not going to now."

Driving headlong into a roaring hell we commenced to ship water; one big sea broke into the cock-pit and I could see Midge was very worried. I cannot understand how we ever got through, but once outside and taking a south-westerly course, the waves were astern, and notwithstanding the rough sea we drove steadily ahead. Passing Cape San Blas, after an hour

or two we sighted Escribanos Reef, when the wind veered to the north, and as the crested waves caught us more abeam the boat started to roll heavily. The wind increased in force to half a gale. Midge was whispering to Robbie and John George, and looking more anxious every minute. A sea curled and broke on deck—we were holding on for our lives while a cataract of water poured again into the cock-pit. Midge was nearly torn from the wheel.

"Go below," he barked, "and see if there's any water in the cabin."

Grasping the rail with both hands I crawled along, and was about to go below when I was flung down violently, bruising myself horribly, the pain turning me quite faint. I struggled against my weakness, and creeping back gasped out that all was well. Midge beckoned to the two men and we all came to the conclusion that to continue our journey to Nombre de Dios was out of the question. Every moment the blow was increasing in force, and nothing could save our boat from foundering if we were mad enough to defy the elements further. There was no harbour into which we could put or island to creep behind. We had almost given ourselves up for lost when John George remembered that several miles farther on there was a deep pool of water close in behind a reef, but to reach it we should have to pass through a narrow channel, and he did not hesitate to tell us that the risk was one only to be taken as a forlorn hope.

"That's exactly what it is," said Midge, "a forlorn hope, but we've got to take the chance."

Rolling so horribly that every moment I expected we would capsize, old John George who was watching the mainland closely, suddenly comforted us with the words :

"We're off it now."

There was not the slightest sign of any calm piece of water or break in the reef as I looked shoreward—only

mountains of white foam breaking 40 feet into the air. We turned sharply, and then had the sea astern driving us headlong for the shore. As we drew closer no opening was visible. John George kept enquiring anxiously whether we could see a black rock sticking up—but there was nothing but white flying spume—a roaring waste of churned water. Our old pilot 'was muttering to himself, when in a high-pitched, hysterical voice, Robbie exclaimed :

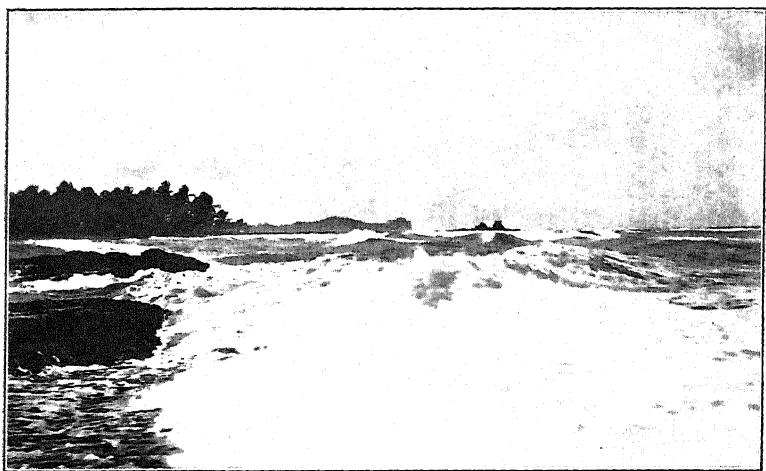
“ There it is, John, right ahead ! ”

Yes, there it was, a black object just showing above the water at intervals in the valleys as the seas raced on. I held my breath—we were lifted feet into the air by a giant roller, and dashed forward at terrific speed to what seemed certain death. I took in kaleidoscopically the expression of Midge's face and a white wall of water—then closed my eyes. A reverberating boom shook the yacht which rushed on as though driven by some unseen demon force. Suddenly all was quiet, and when I opened my eyes I found Fate had not ordained this to be the end of all things, for we were in dead calm water.

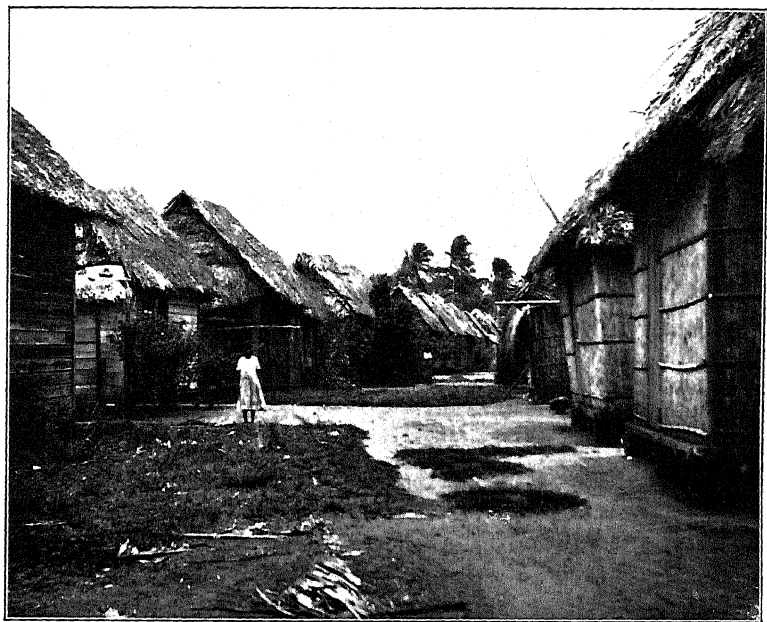
I have often heard it said that when one is in great danger and death seems inevitable, one's past rises uppermost, while the mind instinctively turns to the hereafter. My experience does not bear this out. The horror of our position was so nerve-shattering that my mind was an absolute blank. I discussed the question later with Midge, to find his feelings tallied with mine.

“ There wasn't much time for thinking,” he added cheerfully, “ if we'd hit the reef we'd have been pulped in a second.”

To old John George must be given the credit that we are alive to-day, for had his nerve failed or his hand deviated the fraction of an inch on the wheel, we should inevitably have been dashed to pieces. I called to mind afterwards that he was talking to the boat the whole time just as we would to a horse, while Robbie told me



VIENTO FRIO, WHERE WE SHOT THE AWFUL REEF (p. 194).



VILLAGE OF VIENTO FRIO (p. 194).

later that he had felt certain his time had come to stand before the "Heaven Man."

After the danger we had passed through, a violent reaction came over me, and, although prostrate and hungry, I fell into a sleep of utter exhaustion in the afternoon, not waking till the following morning, when we went ashore to find a Panaman village tucked away in this remote spot. As we walked through, the natives looked at us as if we were some strange creatures. Although only just after sunrise, the syncopated beating of the tom-toms was already heard. A few men and women were swaying their bodies in a curious way that made me realise that the exhibitions given in Montmartre for the benefit of tourists are not so original after all. This dance, the Congo, was not very edifying, and I only stopped long enough to discover the fact.

Where the village ended and the bush commenced a river emptied into the sea.

"At last I can have a good wash," I exclaimed. On the chance of it I had brought towels with me. The river was in flood, portions of the sandy bank being carried away as we watched it, but nothing daunted, I threw off the overall which covered my bathing costume, and we both waded in, very soon to be the cynosure of many of the natives who had crowded to see the strange sight of two white people splashing in the rapid, turbid current.

The bathe over, we returned to the yacht, and the sea having somewhat subsided, again essayed the dangerous feat of navigation required to creep out through the narrow break in the reef to the open sea. Jagged coral fangs on either side showed plainly how narrow had been our escape when rushing through the previous day. Once well out to sea we encountered a favourable wind, and with this behind us ran before it steadily for the rest of the day, passing Garoti and Porto Bello without a stop, and late in the afternoon sighted the

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Wireless Station, to be followed by the outline of Colon Harbour, which we reached just as darkness was falling.

When the boat was finally moored snug alongside the little dock we solemnly shook hands, and hurried to the Washington Hotel, where we ordered the best dinner and champagne we could get in celebration of our return.

As was to be expected, we were besieged for news, but purposely withheld all details, stating frankly that we wished nothing to be made public until an opportunity had been given for scientists to go carefully through our collection. In spite of this many sensational reports leaked out, as, not to be thwarted, some genius connected with the press interviewed Robbie and John George, and through them discovered that a great meeting of the Indians had taken place down the coast, where some extraordinary ceremony had been gone through in which we had both taken an active part. It was a source of much embarrassment to us when we read about it in the papers ; the reporter had certainly given free play to a vivid imagination.

Only staying in Colon a short time, we left for the Pacific.

Though many people have ridiculed the idea, I still cherish the belief that Panama will be a great commercial country, that one day the cities of Colon and Panama will be hives of industry, and that a species of boom in real estate and other things will take place. Panama is one of the richest countries agriculturally in the world ; coffee, cocoa, and in fact almost anything can be grown in profusion.

The United States Government rendered us every possible assistance and courtesy in making our passage through the Canal, which is replete with the most up-to-date machinery, and can coal ships at the rate of 1,000 tons an hour. Forty-five minutes' run and we paused before the mighty Gatun locks—the massive iron gates

opened slowly by an invisible agency, closing silently behind us. As we entered the first lock, lines were thrown to us from the top, which was about 50 feet above our heads. These made fast, a seething boil at once burst up beneath us, continuing until finally we could have stepped from the deck to the level, where the heavy iron mules, all electrically driven, run on rails and are hitched to all liners in order to tow them in position.

We passed through two more locks, duplicates of the first, then found ourselves out in the waters of the Gatun Lake, and were able to steam at full speed. We had dispensed with a pilot, and found the navigation of the well-buoyed channel a comparatively simple matter. We encountered several big boats on their way from the Pacific to the Atlantic—one must have been over 20,000 tons. They all gave us a great ovation, for the morning papers which had been taken out to them at Balboa had made a good deal of our return and our little yacht was unmistakable.

We reached the famous Culebra Cut in four hours from leaving Gatun. Many landslides have taken place here, crippling the passage of all ships for the time being. We passed Pedro Miguel, then after a short run entered Miraflores, the last of the locks, and eight hours from the time we left Colon merged into the Pacific, never pausing until the anchor was dropped off Taboga Island, which we determined should be our headquarters for deep-sea research work and exploration in this part of the world.

It took two whole days to get the collection ashore, where we decided to store it till we left for England.

Taboga Island is a gem; it rises some 1,000 feet behind the perfect example of a little Spanish village nestling on the shore. The small population is exclusively Panaman. Many tropical fruits grow in profusion, though limes, papaya, and pineapples (stated to be the finest in the world) are the principal. It is a

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remarkable sight to see the latter growing in what look like fields on the mountain side—so steep that it would be difficult for anyone to work there. To plant and later gather them is quite a feat.

The rough trail to the top of the hill is a narrow one, a running stream gurgling down in places.

Midge had conceived the idea of having huge hooks and other tackle made in an attempt to capture great fish, so while he ran over to the United States Government shops at Balboa for this purpose, I started on an exploration of my own.

Nearing the top of the aforementioned trail, I passed through a grove of mango trees all laden with the luscious fruit, and when finally emerging was fully repaid for my arduous climb. The mainland stretches out in a vast panorama, the cone-like mountains, range after range, appearing like a stage setting. Looking towards Panama City, slightly to the right is Taboguilla, clothed to its steep crest in a brilliant green mantle, while to the left first the little island of Morro, joined at low water to Taboga by a narrow spit of sand, can be seen, then Tortola and Changarmi; in the distance at the entrance to the Canal the heavily fortified island of Flamenco catches the eye, connected by a road to Perico, while between them the white houses of Panama City peep out. Seaward, dignified and solitary, Otoque and Bona stand out like sentinels in the Pacific, while separated from Taboga by a deep narrow channel lies Urava, and though over 40 miles away I could make out the dim outline of the Pearl Islands.

This was my first impression as I sat on the summit looking round, but in the vast expanse of which at this height I had a bird's-eye view, everything appeared in miniature. I was glad I had seized this opportunity to come, for I knew the weeks that lay before us would be full of work and interest, as the green-blue expanse of water stretched before me gave promise of big fish. I

should not have been surprised to have seen at any moment a burst of foam and the pre-historic ichthyosaurus appear. I share with Midge the belief that anything, no matter how strange or grotesque, may exist in the unknown depths of tropical seas.

I had brought something to eat, intending to make a day of it, but in the excitement of going off on my own had forgotten anything to drink, and tried to solve the difficulty in much the same way as I did once before when I put my face into a river while Midge held my feet. In this instance, however, I found it most unsatisfactory. In a small, disused, broken-down hut near by I discovered half a calabash and with it managed very well. Necessity is the mother of invention, and a calabash does duty for many things in this part of the world.

On entering the mango grove again a number of beautiful flowering bushes attracted my eye. I left the path, and wandering among them soon lost my way entirely. It did not worry me much, for I knew that if the worst came to the worst, by forcing my way downwards I must ultimately come out all right. While doing this I came on three ancient-looking neglected head-stones. Tied on to them were streamers of frayed book-muslin, probably huge bows originally. I have no idea what significance was attached to this decoration, but on my return to the village was regaled with the legend concerning them. They are believed to be the graves of three pirates who were killed by the inhabitants when attempting to land and despoil the village, though why they should have taken the trouble to carry the bodies to the top of the hill for burial goodness only knows.

CHAPTER VIII

ITCH AND GUSÁNO—THE LEGACIES FROM THE JUNGLE— FIVE BOAT-LOADS OF SHRIEKING NATIVES TOWED ROUND THE BAY

THAT evening my feet and legs commenced to irritate. This had often happened before, but instead of giving any relief scratching only seemed to aggravate it. In bed the irritation became worse, and in the morning I noticed Midge, who had returned from Balboa the previous night, tearing himself. It did not take us long to discover the horrible truth—both of us had contracted the itch in the Chucunaque. I shall not attempt to describe what we went through during the next few weeks, but the sores which broke out on my instep and the calves of my legs have scarred me for life.

This, however, was not the least of my troubles. I have already described how, after we had been lost in the jungle, we lay down to rest by the edge of a swamp that lay between us and the sea. It is unquestionable that the stabs we had felt while there were made by the gusáno fly (*chrysomya macellaria*). The disgust of my itch was now accentuated by finding under the skin beneath my arm, and on the back of my neck, something alive and moving, causing not only intense irritation but also inflammation. Midge, who carefully examined the places, at once knew what was the matter.

"You've got screw worms," he said; "damned filthy things! When you felt the stabs of the gusáno it was depositing an egg under the surface—it's a beastly nuisance, but I'll get them out in a few minutes."

"Yes, but what's moving?" I enquired anxiously.

"Well," he answered, "the eggs hatch out and a white worm or maggot commences to feed—that's what's worrying you now."

To think that anything so repulsive was beneath my skin nearly made me sick.

He produced the inevitable pipe. Mystified, I watched him pull out the stem, thick with nicotine, and smear each spot.

"Keep still!" he said, "they're working up."

Then with a fine lance he nicked the skin and in a few minutes had removed five filthy maggots from where they had been burrowing. Such are the joys of exploring.

A few days after this, having returned to Balboa and collected a mass of strange-looking tackle, which included monstrous hooks, chains, and piles of manilla rope, we left for Taboguilla, and at the first attempt landed the largest fish I had ever seen—a shovel-nose shark 14 feet 6 inches long and weighing 1,460 pounds.¹

The island of Taboguilla is one of the most beautiful in the world. I have travelled extensively in the tropics and the east and have never seen anything finer. It is impossible to land on the ocean side, there being no break in the rocky sides against which the lazy rollers of the Pacific ceaselessly thunder, but the shore facing the mainland has a wonderful golden sandy beach where no surf breaks and only a gentle ripple is lapping.

Above high-water mark, where the palms and tropical vegetation meet the sand, dwells a large colony of hermit crabs. Empty shells washed up by the tide make excellent homes, and these strange creatures have annexed them and run about inland, carrying their homes on their backs like snails.

The heat was so terrific I found walking about above sea-level with bare feet an impossibility for more than

a few minutes at a time ; although my soles were fairly hardened, had I done so my feet would have been badly blistered. The shells of these crabs were scorchingly hot, but this apparently had no effect on them. I have often made a trip here on purpose to watch their curious habits ; they could climb the bushes and trees easily, the shell on their backs not seeming to impede their progress in any way. When they captured a fly, the movement was so rapid that I could hardly follow it. Another source of food supply for them was a colony of flag ants. All day long these busy insects passed backwards and forwards, and cut out pieces of leaves which they carried back to their home. This was done in a wonderfully orderly way—it was like the lines of communication taking supplies of food to an army ahead. They were a source of great interest to me, and I noticed they had scouts and leaders. When one of the workers strayed from the line, another ant would dart out and drive him back at once. They will strip a large tree in a single night.

A lover of nature, I found everything out here well worth watching—even the sea-fleas which abounded in the shallow water fascinated me. In spite of being bitten, I have often stood still, ankle-deep in water, and peered down, sacrificing myself to their bites in order to watch their habits, which are remarkably like those of the “common or garden” domestic flea.

The pools in the rocks contained more wonders. Large flowering anemones, some 6 inches in diameter and quite as beautiful as many flowers on land. It amused me to insert a tiny piece of sea-weed gently in the centre and watch them close round it,

At Port Royal, in Jamaica, attached to the little stone jetty are numbers of living marine flowers absolutely different from those I have seen in the Pacific. A stem 3 or 4 inches long and as thick as a lead pencil grows out on the stone, and at the end of it, spread out like an

umbrella, is a beautifully tinted wavy anemone. The instant it is touched it shoots down within its stem and disappears.

High up on the rocky side of Taboguilla, facing Taboga, is a bed of beautiful white orchids. Their scent during the day was only faint, but as soon as the sun set the air was permeated with a glorious perfume—almost overpowering, and very like that of the tuberose. It entailed a certain amount of risk to reach where they grew, but was well worth the climb, as when once they were removed with their roots they required no water. I tied several bunches on the wooden lattice of my window at Taboga, where they flowered for weeks without attention.

A spring bubbled out of the rock on the side of the hill most unexpectedly, the natives ascribing miraculous healing powers to it. But I have yet to discover a spring in the tropics to which a similar belief is not attached.

The Pacific abounds in many remarkably beautiful shells. An observer will notice that many sea-shells assimilate with the colours of the sea-weed and rocks in an extraordinary manner. An analogy is found in caterpillars and insects, many of the former taking the shape and colour of the twig on which they rest ; and several species of butterfly are almost indistinguishable from a leaf when the wings are folded ; while the praying mantis so closely resembles the tree on which it may be resting that it is practically indistinguishable unless it moves. One discovers the same thing through various forms of life ; it is Nature's way of protecting them from their natural enemies.

The more one sees of marine life, the more definite becomes the certainty of evolution. Off Five Tree Cove, Jamaica ; in the San Blas ; and later in the Pacific, where shelter was afforded from the rough seas, I found growing what can only be described as miniature trees,

resembling the well-known Japanese dwarf plants, but on a much smaller scale. In the marine gardens of the Kaymaals some of the sea-weed growths attain a height of 6 feet. These under-water forests, with their innumerable strange inhabitants, were again comparable with the land jungle ; and when one takes into consideration the diversified forms of life and the vast areas they cover, from the lowest medusæ to the mammal, all existing in the ocean, one cannot help asking the question—"Where is the dividing line between fish and mammal?" It has always been a puzzle to me where aquatic life ends and that of the land begins, especially as several species live both in water, breathing through the gills, and on land through the lungs. When the rivers in which they swim become dry at certain periods of the year, they remain in the mud on the bottom (the heat of the sun apparently not affecting them in the least), and breathe by means of their lungs, seemingly quite contented until the rainy season starts again and the rivers fill.

The weeks that followed were largely devoted to the capture of big fish. Some of the records may be of interest :

Sand-shark (on rod and line), 620 pounds.

Hammer-head shark (on hand lines and 14-pound hooks), 1,350 pounds, 17 feet 6 inches long.

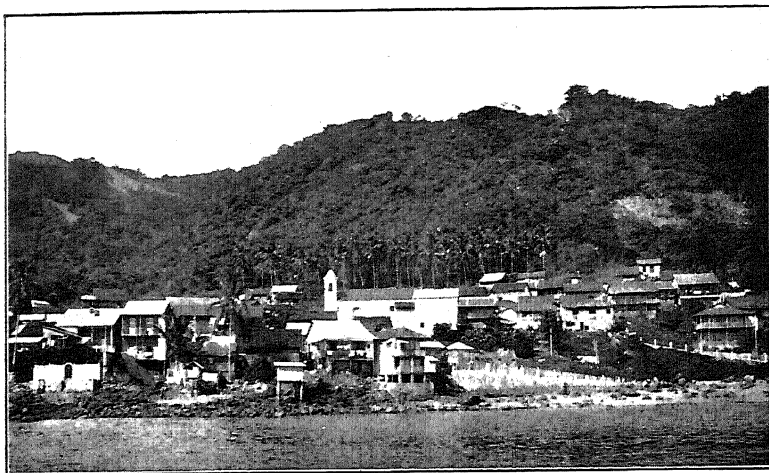
Tiger-shark (on hand lines and 14-pound hook), 1,760 pounds, 20 feet 9 inches long.

Male sawfish (on hand lines and 14-pound hooks), 4,500 pounds, 29 feet long.

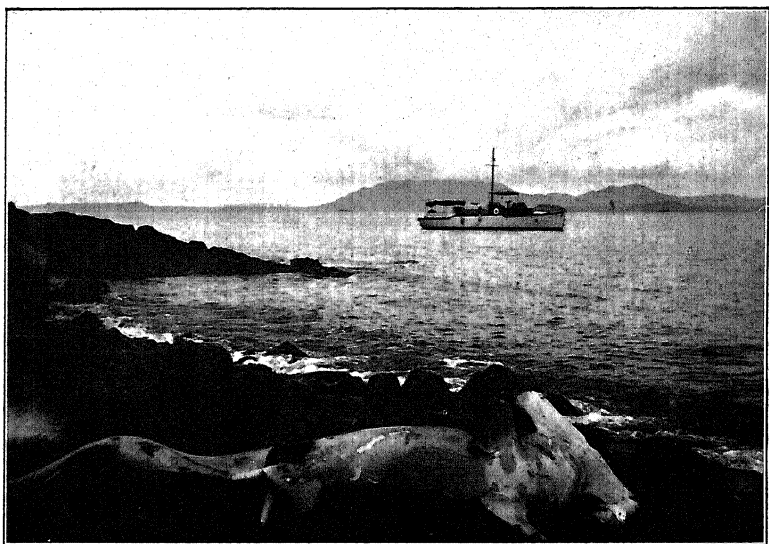
Female sawfish (on hand lines and 14-pound hooks), 5,700 pounds, 31 feet long.

Besides these we landed innumerable other fish ; every day held a fresh experience and added to my knowledge.

Early one morning, looking out across the bay from



SPANISH VILLAGE ON TABOGA ISLAND (p. 204).



"CARA" OFF TABOQUILLA. 17-FT. 6-IN. SHARK IN FOREGROUND (p. 204).

Taboga, I saw far out what looked like jets of steam shooting into the air from the sea. At the same time a brown mass showed above the surface. A line of leviathans was heading so that it must pass within 200 yards of where I was sitting. I had my glasses and eagerly followed the movements of this school of whales as they drew closer. When abreast I had a splendid view of the happy creatures gambolling. There were several families, comprising bull, cow, and calf, among them—all enjoying themselves hugely, the mothers tossing their little ones with their giant lateral fins, while the proud father scouted round in circles, on the watch for danger. They were in full view for over half an hour before they swam slowly round the end of the island.

On another occasion when we were walking along the sands searching for sea-shells, a report like that of a gun came across the sea. Looking up we saw a great boil of water. We continued to watch and in a few minutes were rewarded—a colossal black mass suddenly sprang clear of the water, and crashed back, sending waves into the air. The little village of Taboga became alive. The natives ran down to the beach, shouting and gesticulating wildly, manning several boats. Standing in the bow of the leading craft a man balanced himself holding a long pole; they slowed down as they approached, then warily stalked their game. The rowers stopped pulling—down flashed the harpoon amidst yells from the natives. We could see the rope attached to the pole tighten with a jerk on the panga (a flat-bottomed boat), which raced through the water towed by a mighty, invisible force.

"There's going to be trouble if they're not careful," remarked Midge; "they've struck a huge sea-bat."

The boat behind the big fish in the meantime was far out-distancing the other pangas, in spite of its crew's desperate efforts to row up and help. It was a laughable sight. In all, five boats had gone out.

"Great Scot! look!!" cried Midge suddenly, by this time as excited as the natives.

The black mass again came into the air, flapping wildly. When it smashed back into the water it did not dive below at once but beat the surface furiously, spray flying in all directions.

"If that fish turns and crashes on them it'll be 'amen,' " I said.

"They know what they're up to; the other boats are catching up, and we'll see some fun in a minute."

The craft, straining to their utmost, were drawing near, the fish ever continuing to beat the water. A rope spun through the air from the foremost boat, to be caught by the crew of the one attached to the fish. The giant ray went off again just before the other boats could also hitch on, but after a time they all managed to join on one to the other, and then we saw the amazing sight of five pangas full of natives, all shrieking like demons, being towed round Taboga Bay.

The fight went on for nearly two hours, when, all pulling in unison, they commenced to work foot by foot towards the beach, where the entire population of the island awaited them, but it was a muscle-racking business. They would gain perhaps 20 or 30 yards before the struggling fish would haul them out again.

We sat down, determined to be in at the death. Four hours elapsed before the natives on shore could run into the sea up to their shoulders and grasp the bow of the nearest boat and slowly commence to pull.

"Go easy!" shouted my excited companion; "you'll tear the harpoon out!"

The boat grounded, the second, third, and fourth following. In the shallow water the hideous flat creature was making desperate efforts to escape, and I should have been sorry for anyone foolhardy enough to come within reach of its flukes.

"I wish we'd got it," I said regretfully.

"It's not a record," said Midge; "the two we heard of at Savanna la Mar were nearly thirty feet across—this is nothing like that size."

The natives by this time had got hold of the harpoon rope, and the fish was on the bottom in 3 feet of water, its back and tail well out. The tide was dropping rapidly, but we could not persuade those fools to stop hauling—at least fifty of them were tugging at the rope when the harpoon suddenly came away with a wrench, tearing a hole, through which a fountain of blood spurted.

"Oh, the idiots!" groaned Midge.

The fish slipped back; excitedly once more they tried to dash the steel into it, but missed. With a lazy movement of the flukes it slowly disappeared, leaving an angry crowd of people each blaming the other.

That night, just after I had retired, boom after boom floated across the water. Although it was impossible to see anything it was easy to know a number of these great sea-bats had come in. Late as it was, I heard Midge go down to the village and knew intuitively it was to arrange for us to have a shot at them ourselves next day, but alas! our hopes were dashed to the ground, for by sunrise they had all gone.

Taboga Island is the home of some of the largest tarantulas I have ever seen; we often came across one on the trail that led to the mountain top. They are sinister-looking giant spiders, their legs and body covered with thick dark-brown hair, some of them spanning 4 inches. We kept one alive for a long time in a glass jar, thinking we might bring it home if we could get it to feed, but all our efforts were useless—it refused everything, and fasted for three weeks. In the end we gave it its freedom, when it appeared none the worse for its hunger strike.

There are a good many snakes on Taboga Island, one kind being highly poisonous. They were to be found

in the most unexpected places. For some reason the kitchen was a favourite haunt, the attraction probably being mice and rats. One afternoon we came across a snake that had entered through the wire netting used in lieu of window panes. It had evidently swallowed something large and, endeavouring to return the same way, had imprisoned itself. With much difficulty, and with the aid of a stick, we got it away from the wire, but when it fell to the ground we broke its back, and it lay still, squirming, hissing, and darting out its venomous, forked tongue.

Another time, walking down to the shed where the jaws and vertebræ of the sharks were sun-drying, I almost stepped on one with my naked foot. In future I was careful to "watch my step."

When the news of our big fish captures became widely known, it was surprising what a number of people visited the island. Among the many who came out were Dr. Belisario Porras (President of Panama), Mr. Percy Bennett (British Minister), the British Consul, and Dr. Casey, the latter coming all the way from Texas. Not a week passed without Panama's leading newspaper, the *Star and Herald*, devoting considerable space to our discoveries. Ultimately the General Manager, accompanied by the Sporting Editor and Mr. Ossa of Panama City, came over and spent a few days on board the *Cara*, to see for themselves how the big fish were caught, and while fishing with them I had an experience which will not soon be forgotten.

CHAPTER IX

MY NARROW ESCAPE FROM A GHASTLY DEATH—I LAND MY RECORD FISH

Most people have an idea that sharks are only to be found in deep water at a considerable distance from the shore. It is true that large sharks are frequently seen far out to sea, and have been caught by sailors on becalmed sailing ships, but my experience is that they are in far greater numbers close to land. The reason is not far to seek, as they feed principally on small fish, shoals of which are to be found much oftener in shallow waters than in the depths ; and it is natural the shark should go where he can obtain food most easily.

For the same reason pelicans, frigate birds, and cormorants are far more numerous near shore than out to sea, for they are entirely dependent on small fish to provide them with their necessary daily fare.

It must be remembered that all the shark family have a very keen scent. The blood or carcase of a fish or animal dropped into the water gives an excellent demonstration of how susceptible these fish are to smell. If there is any current, in a very short time an observer will notice first one and then another dorsal fin appear, unerringly making for the spot ; a shark will pick up the scent as far away as 10 miles. Many times after we had killed a big fish with a rifle, I have seen numbers of sharks working up like bloodhounds hot on the trail. We have frequently placed a carcase on the sand, the water lapping it as the tide rose, and very shortly first one and then another shark would make its appearance,

swimming into the shallow water until they could get no farther, and even then wriggling on their bellies to try and snap at the feast so tantalisingly near. We have stood on the shore and harpooned them as they did this, and have caught them from the beach with our shark lines, the bait not being more than 5 yards out.

It was a source of great interest to watch the feeding habits of these fish, which could easily be done if a carcase were placed in a few feet of shallow water.

I have never once seen a shark turn on its back or side—it always rushes straight forward, the nose rises, exposing the teeth, which close with immense force, cutting out a great mass of flesh as cleanly as if removed with a razor. Whenever we waded in the water it was always with much trepidation, and we could never relax our vigilance for one moment, but had to be ever watchful for the tell-tale dorsal fin. Constant familiarity with these sights, however, bred a contempt which occasionally made one forget the motto "ever watchful."

We left Taboga early one morning, accompanied by Messrs. Typaldos and Ossa, on board the yacht for Melones, a small, flat-topped, rocky island 5 miles away, and dropped anchor 40 yards offshore in a tiny horse-shoe-shaped sandy bay with rocks jutting out on either side, and facing the mainland.

It was an abnormally hot day even for this part of the world, and the fishing was disappointing, for at the end of two hours we had only caught one sand-shark weighing about 240 pounds. We had arrived on the ebb tide and it was now almost dead low water.

As I have said, I am a keen collector of shells, and Mr. Typaldos, who had been out here before, suggested we should land on the island and search for pearl oysters, which were to be found attached to the side of the rocks, but could only be got when the tide was full out. I readily agreed, and Robbie rowed us to the sandy beach in the dinghy, Mr. Ossa and Midge declining the invita-

tion to come with us. What with the heat and their pipes, manlike, they hated to be disturbed in their somnolence, for although they were supposed to be fishing, in reality they were half asleep.

For an amateur conchologist like myself previously unvisited seashores have a strange attraction, and I lost myself in the pleasure of the many different empty shells which could be seen very plainly in the few inches of brilliantly clear water where, gently moved by a little ripple, they caught the eye far more easily than when cast up on the beach. The basket on my arm bore testimony to my success as I paddled along ankle-deep in water. Standing quite still with my back to the sea, searching carefully, across the water I heard two voices hoarse with fear shouting : " Don't move ! Look behind you—for God's sake don't step back ! "

The intonation quickly made me realise that I was in imminent and awful danger. Fortunately I had the presence of mind to turn my head without moving my body. The entire dorsal fin and back of a big shark were out of the water—the waiting mouth not 3 feet from where I was standing—one backward step and I shudder to think of the consequences, but one step forward and I was on dry land and safe. I turned round to have a look at the brute, but it took not the slightest notice of me.

Mr. Typaldos, who was some little distance away, had heard the shouts, and as he ran towards me picked up a big piece of rock and hurled it at the monster. As if contemptuous it slowly turned—a lazy movement of the tail and it retreated, but only for a few yards, for we could still see the dorsal fin slowly patrolling backwards and forwards across the surface.

Robbie had returned to the yacht, where the lazy males had been galvanised into activity. When they all got into the dinghy to come ashore, I knew what they were going to do.

Midge greeted me with : " We're going to get that brute."

They had brought one of the big shark lines along and, baiting with a huge lump of the sand-shark we had caught earlier in the day, this was rowed out to about 40 yards from the spot where the shark had hoped to make a meal off me, and the dinghy had hardly returned from dropping the bait when away went the line. The malignant brute was still waiting out there, but this time got more than it bargained for. We had fastened one end of the line round a huge rock, and all of us seizing the rope struck hard. The shock nearly flung us off our feet, and we could never have held it had the rope not been well fastened. The men seemed to have got the blood lust and were almost as savage as the fish. As hard as they could they strained and worked until they had got the brute near in, with its back out of the water. Midge had not forgotten the rifle. Bang !—an answering thud and a spout of blood—one bullet had smashed its way home. Crack !—another—and again. So vindictive were the men that they would have hacked it to pieces in the shallow water with their knives, and frankly I would cheerfully have helped. Robbie went back to the yacht to fetch our native boy, and all together we commenced to haul. Inch by inch we managed to work it on the beach, where we photographed the creature, surrounded by our little party.

It is always foolish for visitors who come out to the tropics to bathe and wade in waters containing life of which they are absolutely ignorant. So often have I heard the plea advanced that " people have bathed there for years."

There is always danger in tropical seas. Take the awful death of Miss McClatchie at Tampa Bay, Florida ; the shocking tragedy of Miss Adelin Lopez in Kingston Harbour ; and again the most recent, which took place

opposite the house which we occupied while fishing at Black River, and within 200 yards of the shore.

From the details given to me I can reconstruct the whole tragedy. The victim was a French boy who was paying his first visit to tropical seas. A blazing hot day—the poor little chap sweltering in the heat on deck, with the tempting water lapping the side only a few feet below, blue, calm, and inviting. How well I know the feeling—it seems to call you. He looked at it two or three times longingly—not a ripple on the surface—the temptation became too great. He divested himself of his clothing and slipped over the side. A few strokes—and oh God! the horror of it!

His companions saw the great fish attack, but were powerless to help. A dorsal fin flashed through the water, followed by a piteous, agonising shriek, and then red blood and foam surged to the surface. Leaping into the schooner's boat the watchers smashed and beat the water with their oars, momentarily driving the voracious monster away. They gripped the white, mutilated body, but even as they lifted it from the water there came another great swirl—a snap of the jaws, and when they got what was once a gay little French boy into the boat half his side had been completely bitten out, while a leg below the knee was missing, having been seized just as they were lifting him. The only consolation was that death must have been instantaneous, for the wound in the side was so frightful that after his first shriek he can have known no more, and so another victim was added to the long list of those who will not heed the ever-present, hidden menace of the calm serenity of tropical seas.

We subsequently had the pleasure of entertaining Mr. H. W. Huggins, an Englishman who pays periodical visits to this part of the world. He had acquired, and brought to an excellent state of cultivation, a cocoa estate near Chorrera, where he lived for 3 or 4 months in the year, though his choice of a residence did not excite

my envy. To reach it one must either make a long journey by boat across the Gatun Lake, or travel through to the Pacific side and take a coasting steamer, when, after landing at the nearest point, quite a strenuous journey has still to be faced, and on arrival one's chief occupation is scratching and driving away mosquitoes.

He had two or three set-backs, but persevered, nothing daunted. He had planted several acres of young cocoa trees and they were doing well when, owing to the abnormally rainy season, he had the mortification of seeing the river come up and carry away every tree.

One can only appreciate what a really heavy tropical rain is like when one sees it. It is literally a wall of water.

Just before leaving for England he tore himself away from his estate and came out on the yacht with us, being an ardent fisherman. I was not present at the first attempt, which must have been very perfunctory, for they caught very little, if anything. As a matter of fact, they were so busy talking of the Old Country that they had no time to think of anything else.

The next day I went with them, and not three minutes had elapsed after running out the lines before they were fast into two fish, which on landing proved to be sand-sharks, each weighing round 300 pounds.

Fired with enthusiasm, and as the place was swarming with fish, Mr. Huggins suggested that we should try to make a record. I never saw such fishing. Every time the lines were run out the bait could hardly have reached the bottom before a fish struck. They landed eight and would have gone on were it not that flesh and blood could no longer stand the strain—gasping, and with perspiration pouring down them they simply had to rest, so I took a turn.

This called forth a remark from Midge that put me on my mettle—to the effect that he would bet a dollar that if I hooked a fish I would lose it. At that

moment away went the line. No doubt I should have allowed the hook to be driven home when the end of the line was reached, but instead of that struck. A pain like that of a red-hot iron seared my hands as the line was torn through. Both shouted to let go, but the lust of battle was roused, and I was determined to catch that fish myself, no matter what the cost. They were worrying me all the time to let them take the line, but the only way they could get hold of it was to tear it out of my hands by brute force. Ultimately I managed to work the fish alongside the boat, when Midge fired two bullets into it, but for some unknown reason, instead of killing it immediately, the line was again torn through my hands at a tremendous pace, causing more excruciating pain than ever. Had this not been the shark's last effort I'm sure I should have given in, but when brought alongside again it was quite dead. The men hauled it on deck, measured and weighed it and found the scale tipped at 415 pounds.

Except for the painful reminder of my hands, which had been torn and lacerated by the line—so that for three weeks they had to be bandaged—I had dismissed the capture from my mind, but one morning copies of various American and Canadian papers arrived with photographs and full story of the fight. I have always felt Mr. Huggins and Midge were responsible; I did not know till I saw the headlines that it was a world's record for a woman.

My hands were in such a condition that I was unable to take part in further fishing that day, but the two men continued their efforts to break all records.

The day's work ended by Mr. Huggins striking something which was certainly not a sand-shark, and entailed the pulling up of the anchor and starting of the engine to prevent the straining line bursting. It was one of our lighter ones, and was, as usual, tied on the capstan.

In the end, after we had gone 3 miles from where

the first fish had been struck, it was worked slowly alongside the yacht.

"Look over the side!" yelled Mr. Huggins.

I did, and for the first time saw a tiger-shark. It was unlike any we had yet caught, the body striped and mottled. The eyes were quite different from those of any other fish I have seen—black, vindictive, and seeming to express undying hate every time a disc-like shutter crossed them, so that they appeared to be opening and closing all the time. As the rifle rang out and the bullets smashed into it, the mighty tail crashed against the side of the yacht, causing the boat to shiver under the shock. It then reared from the water and shook itself in a spasm of fury. Two more shots, blood spurting feet into the air, and then the end—the great bulk, quivering and spasmodically jerking with muscular contraction, lay dead.

Getting a heavy rope round the tail, we fastened it astern and then proceeded slowly to tow the fish back to Taboguilla.

It took over an hour to beach the day's catch. We landed sixteen sand-sharks and one tiger-shark. The latter was 14 feet 2 inches long, and weighed 1,370 pounds; while the total of the seventeen was 6,490 pounds.

This result was published in American and English newspapers as a world's record for one day's capture on hook and line.

It is curious that every one of the natives at Taboga had a fixed belief that unless I went out fishing with the men they would catch nothing, and this superstition was greatly enhanced by our day's enormous catch. Down in the village that night they declared it was all owing to my presence, and Midge had considerable trouble in getting them to go out fishing without me, meeting several times with a flat refusal, as they gravely asked: "Why waste time by going without the lady?"

Off Taboga (besides sand-sharks and saw-fish, which of course needed special tackle and could only be caught from the yacht) we landed many strange and remarkable fish on rod and line—the molten-silver-bellied gar-fish, with peacock-blue back and long pointed nose like a sword ; blow-fish with a mouth like a parrot's beak which when brought up and gently stroked commences to blow itself out till at last it becomes round and swollen like a football, and when thrown in the water floats on the top for a minute or two until recovered from its astonishment, when, having the power to inflate and deflate at will, it disappears beneath the surface. This is a provision of nature to protect it from its enemies. I can imagine the surprise of another fish as it contemplates its apparently defenceless victim, and then sees it suddenly begin to expand and turn into a balloon before its eyes.

We also landed a species of fish that had all the appearance of a pig, while the noise that issued from two holes where the pectoral fins are situated accentuated the impression, for when brought to land it made a decided, regular grunt. It was nearly black in colour, except for a broad orange band which completely encircled the body.

If travellers in the tropics want an interesting day, I recommend them to spend it by the seashore, wearing as few clothes as possible and prepared for a little exertion. Either among the rocks or on a coral reef one can see more grotesque and extraordinary life in a single day than anywhere else—amazing-looking creatures of the crab family, slothful in their movements and almost indistinguishable from the rocks underneath which they live, though it must not be forgotten that it is necessary to move and turn over the coral and rock to get a full idea of this strange world ; repulsive star-fish, black and wriggling, which on being disturbed move off sideways like a crab ; small fish with flat,

venomous heads ; and occasionally one will encounter a sea-cat or cuttle-fish. The tentacles with their rows of suckers, the flaccid, elongated body, the two eyes situated towards the top, are perfectly horrible. In swimming they propel themselves backwards at a speed which one would not believe possible, and in their hiding-places seem to blend perfectly with their surroundings. When alive in the water they are pale brown ; when dying the brown colour fades and turns a sickly greyish-white. They make fine bait for rod and line.

CHAPTER X

MY INSISTENT PREMONITION OF DISASTER—AN IMPENETRABLE BLUE-BLACK MASS BORE DOWN ON US

ONE hears all sorts of strange stories of octopods in this part of the world ; I know of one place where, no matter what inducement was offered, it would be impossible to get a fisherman to fish off a certain reef. Dug-outs anchored there at different times have suddenly found giant tentacles slithering across them ; the boats have been overturned and the men have never been seen again. A boat with three men once managed to escape, and after they told their experiences the place was " taboo " for ever.

It is beyond question that huge octopods, quite capable of overturning a boat the size of a dug-out, do occur in the Caribbean and Pacific, but it is hard to separate truth from fiction, so diversified and numerous are the tales one hears. There is one which never seems to vary, and is told by the crew of every schooner that trades along the coast of Panama on the Caribbean side, and out to the island of St. Andrew, situated about 200 miles off Costa Rica. All affirm that they have not only seen a fish over 80 feet in length, but that it has remained in full view for some considerable time. This story has been recently published in the press on three separate occasions to my knowledge, and the following are the details of the last account given by a captain and crew.

The creature was first sighted some 5 miles away. It leisurely approached the schooner, swimming round

it in circles for over an hour, when it came close, rubbing itself against the side and rocking the ship violently, although it was a 52-ton boat. All on board were paralysed with fright when the creature reared up so that its colossal head, with eyes as large as saucers, appeared over the gunwale. It stayed with them the whole day, alternately circling and rubbing itself against the side, swimming off slowly in the evening.

There is little variation in any of the versions of this story. I do not know what to make of it, but I do know that we have seen and caught strange creatures in the sea which some years ago I would not have believed existed.

The *Daily Mail* recently published under the heading of "The Wonder Whale" the remarks of Sir Sidney Harmer, Director of the British Museum, Natural History Section, before the Fellows of the Zoological Society when exhibiting a section of the vertebræ of the blue whale that came into Colon Harbour. This gigantic mammal weighed approximately 100 tons and was 98 feet long. The portion of the spinal column exhibited proved to be over a foot larger than the famous Wexford whale which had hitherto been the record. We were fortunate in being able to secure this from Santa Isabel, on the coast near Nombre de Dios, and it now can be seen in the Natural History Museum, South Kensington.

No one knows what the sea contains, nor what strange life it will give up in course of time. Every year adds to our knowledge of creatures ranging from the microscopically small to monsters of which science has previously known little or nothing.

Ever since my narrow escape from death at Melones we had given the little island a wide berth. Though the excitement of catching the fish, and the work in connection with it had diverted my thoughts at the time, yet so intricate and inexplicable is the mechanism of the

mind that two or three weeks later I had no sooner closed my eyes than my recent experiences rose mentally before me. It was not a nightmare, for I was not asleep but only drowsy.

I saw the little sandy bay of Melones, with the yacht at anchor offshore, myself paddling in the water looking down at the shells. The scene changed and a cold breath swept over me—my mind became a regular turmoil—indefinable, black shapes swirled round in a maze, then separated as an exaggerated vision gradually unfolded. Once more I seemed to see the dorsal fin and back of the shark, but such a shark as was never seen before—colossal, jaws agape, rows of frightful teeth, venomous black eyes fixed on me in a baneful glare. It had a set, demoniacal, hypnotic smile which drew me against my will; struggling, fighting, with senses reeling, I could feel myself impelled inch by inch towards the cavernous mouth.

I strove to cry out, but words were choked. It was no longer a dream—my imagination carried me completely away. Now my leg was seized—I felt the awful jaws close with a snap, the teeth cut through flesh and bone—I suffered all the horrors of an awful death. Plainly I saw the men rush to my rescue, but too late! something snapped and I started up in terror to find my body drenched with perspiration and my nerves all on edge. For the rest of the night I suffered torments.

Next morning Midge did his best to laugh away my gloomy thoughts, but I was obsessed with the idea that danger threatened us.

Psychologists may be able to give an explanation of this brain-storm—but my mental suffering increased and I commenced to brood over a horror that was past and could not shake it off.

Not only at night but during the day this phantasmagoria haunted me, the episode at Melones becoming ever more distorted, so that I found myself drifting

into a pitiful condition of nerves, a sword of Damocles ever hanging over my head.

"It's all idiotic nonsense," Midge snorted; "we're going to lay that damned ghost; to-morrow morning we'll start for Melones. You're becoming a wreck—why, you've aged ten years!"

This was more than I could stand. If it had not been for this remark, I should probably have hedged and got out of going. I am sure he knew this and had made it with an ulterior motive, certain that, knowing my nature, wild horses would not keep me from going now.

I had come to look on the approach of night with dread, knowing well what lay in store for me. No sooner did I lie down than the most horrible visions took shape. They were appalling phantoms—a premonition of evil warning me not to go to Melones became insistent.

In the morning Midge, who must have seen that I was in a state of nervous prostration, my haggard appearance and hollow eyes showing plainly that I had passed another night of terrors, rushed me on the boat without giving time for retreat.

Once the engine had started and we had glided out of the little bay I felt better. My mind regained its normal poise and I was ready for the morning meal.

The sea was smooth as glass and the hills on the mainland showed intensely blue and beautiful in the light of early morning.

A school of lazy, wallowing porpoises first excited my interest, and when the dorsal fin of an enormous basking shark appeared above the surface off our bow the last traces of depression disappeared.

"Get the rifle quick and I'll work up as close as I can," said Midge.

When I returned from the cock-pit we were quite near. It was the largest shark I had ever seen—well over 25 feet in length. Its dorsal fin was so large that it

appeared like a miniature sail, and in the clear water the whole outline of the fish was plainly visible, totally unlike anything we had previously encountered ; neither of us could classify it. When we had drawn up within a few yards Midge fired.

It is very difficult to hit an object beneath the water. Owing to the velocity of the bullet, on impact the water either flattens it out or the effect is deadened. In this case, firing at very short range, to miss was quite impossible, but the creature seemed to take little notice. Five more bullets were rapidly, but unsuccessfully, expended, when, quite unharmed, it started in pursuit of some quarry, abruptly turning at right angles, and with immense speed the dorsal fin cut the water, leaving a trail behind as from a fast motor-boat. We watched its course for a mile or two, as it remained close to the surface, the speed never seeming to diminish until lost to view.

" I do hope we'll hook a fellow like that one day," I said.

" I hope to God we won't be in the dinghy when we do," fervently answered Midge.

We had diverted from our course while following the shark, and as it would take at least three-quarters of an hour to reach the island I occupied my time in trolling a light Wilson spoon, to be rewarded almost at once by a strike, landing a fine Spanish mackerel, to be followed by two more, averaging round 5 pounds each ; the sea was alive with them, and they were breaking water in every direction.

On striking the fourth my fishing came to an abrupt end. I was just bringing it alongside when a tremendous swirl of water was followed by a momentary glimpse of a triangular-shaped fin, and bang ! a wrench—and I reeled in a limp line minus lead and spoon bait.

When fishing for smaller fish, sharks in this part of the world are a perfect plague. I can hardly remember a

time when sooner or later our tackle was not lost like this. Very often when one was endeavouring to catch the lunch or dinner, at the first attempt a swirl of water would come, a violent tug on the line, and one's hopes were dashed to the ground.

In rod and line fishing one needs to have a large quantity of spare hooks and tackle, especially in this part of the Pacific, and these must be taken along as it is impossible to get a proper outfit nearer than England or the United States, which entails weeks of waiting, so that anyone going out to fish with rod and line must remember to bring plenty of extra hooks and spoon baits with them. Every eventuality must be taken into account, and when that has been done, duplicate plentifully.

I did no more fishing before we dropped anchor in the little sandy bay in almost the exact spot where we had previously stopped.

We were very glad of the Spanish mackerel for bait and for lunch, and impaling one on a small shark hook, ran it out in the hope of getting the usual 250 or 300-pounder necessary for baiting the 14-pound hooks used in our efforts to capture the monsters.

We had not long to wait, and within twenty minutes had a 280-pound sand-shark on board, to be shortly followed by a second of almost the same weight. We removed a head and tail, divided one up the middle and, using a whole side, transfixed a mass of flesh 75 pounds in weight on one of the big hooks. This was lowered into the dinghy and rowed out about 30 yards from the yacht, then dropped into the water, to sink at once.

We had two runs in succession before we succeeded in driving the hook home, and after playing the fish for some time, brought alongside a shovel-nose shark over 12 feet in length, which we tied to our stern, as we always did, to tow back later.

The heat as the day advanced was appalling, in fact

so bad that the pitch was sizzling in the seams and the paint blistering all over the boat. It was one of the few occasions when the blaze drove us from the deck into the cock-pit, where I suggested we should stop. I had hardly sat down before the awful wave of impending disaster swept over me again. Midge noticed the change, and thinking it was the heat, anxiously asked me if I felt faint.

"I'm all right," I answered, "but believe me—something terrible is going to happen." I said it with such conviction that instead of laughing he for once looked very serious.

"I hope your words aren't really prophetic," he said doubtfully; "it certainly is strange that you can't get this idea out of your head."

"Have you noticed how dreadfully still everything has suddenly become?" I asked him presently. "Let's get back."

We had finished our meal—at least I had, for I had not been able to eat anything. The canvas sides of the cock-pit had been let down to keep out the glare of the sun. Casually pulling them aside, he looked out in the direction of Panama, then leaped to his feet, as did I—for I too had seen.

The whole of the mainland and the islands had disappeared—there was no sky or sea—nothing but an impenetrable blue-black mass which was bearing down rapidly on us. I had seen many storms of various kinds, but this was something different. There was a look of solidity about it which gave the impression that it would sweep and crush everything in its path.

"Robbie," called Midge, "up with the anchor and start the engine as fast as you know how. You were right," he added to me, "we're in for trouble."

The thud of the engine broke the deadly silence; outside not a ripple stirred the water which was inky-black. Midge was at the wheel and muttering to

himself, "Why the devil doesn't he get the anchor up?"

"Boss, it's jammed," Robbie shouted frantically.

Midge rushed to help, but their combined efforts were useless.

"We must just go ahead and tear it out," he said, and as he spoke a puff of wind struck us, followed by a roaring blast as the hurricane burst.

The anchor gave with a wrench which shivered the boat—the fury of the gale was so awful that we were hurled back before it—and then the worst happened. My premonition of disaster had come true, for suddenly the engine failed. Robbie dashed below, making desperate efforts to restart it, but without avail, while all the time we were being swept nearer and nearer the rocks.

"It's the shark tied astern—rope twisted round the propeller," shouted Midge.

He left the wheel and we both made our way aft, hanging on for dear life, and hacked at the rope with a knife desperately again and again, till at last we were free—but alas! too late—as the dead shark sank with the rope we struck the rocks with a jarring smash.

"Jump for your life!" shouted Midge above the gale.

The sea was breaking over us. One big roller carried us off into deep water again, but we were caught on the crest of another and once more flung on the rocks, shivering the boat from stem to stern.

A crash suddenly came from down below—my heart stood still, for I felt certain it was the end, as it seemed impossible that anything could live in this. We were again by a miracle washed into deep water, but were broadside on. I could hardly believe my ears, for above the noise of the tempest I could hear the chug of the engine. We drew ahead a few feet, only to be driven backwards until it appeared as if we must be flung up again. The engine, however, was getting into its stride,

every moment putting distance between us and the deadly rocks—still a little farther. Every instant I expected to hear the engine fail. A wave struck us broadside and buried the yacht. Had we not been holding on grimly, we must have been washed overboard. Spluttering and gasping, drenched through to the skin, we were struck by another before we could nose the boat into the wind. From out the jet-black heavens an unbroken wall of water descended on the deck with a roar like thunder. The breaking waves, raging torrent of water, and howling wind were deafening. How could anything hope to live through it ?

A heavy coil of rope, a bucket, a large box containing potatoes, and loose parts which we carried on deck, had entirely disappeared. Midge told me afterwards he had seen them caught up and whirled away into the air. The blinding rain caused intense pain as it lashed one's face, and was so solid that it was impossible to see the bow of the boat from the wheel. It was blinding Midge, so I held my hand against his forehead to shield his eyes. He looked round in amazement, never realising till that moment that I was still on board.

"Why didn't you jump?" he gasped; "we'll never weather this."

The storm continued with unabated fury; we had no idea where we were being driven, and were entirely at the mercy of the wind. Suddenly there came a lull and a slight break, and to my astonishment I found we had been blown completely round the island, and were once more off the sandy bay where we had originally anchored, and perilously close.

"We're almost ashore again," I shouted in his ear, "run before it—never mind where—it's our only chance."

The break was only temporary; the storm continued with redoubled fury, while the darkness closing in was worse than ever. We were travelling at a terrific pace

with the wind and sea behind us, and were in imminent danger of foundering, for the following rollers breaking over our stern were flooding the cock-pit. This continued for fully an hour before the gale commenced to abate, but the rain was as bad as ever.

Midge called out: "I believe I'm going right for Taboga."

I agreed with him, for we certainly seemed to be heading in that direction. Our compass had been wrenched from its place in front of the wheel, so that all sense of direction was purely guesswork. I was praying for the impenetrable curtain to lift and let us see where we were. The rain lessened and the wind died down, but a tremendous sea was still running. The black mass rapidly rolled over. We gazed round anxiously and at last could see where we were. Instead of heading for Taboga we had been driving straight out into the Pacific, at least 14 miles in the opposite direction.

Following the storm the mountains and land stood out with astonishing clearness—why I do not know; and we knew there would be no chance of Taboga being obscured again, for seldom if ever in the tropics do two severe storms come closely one upon the other.

It was a terrible struggle to make the passage to our anchorage in Taboga Bay, as the bow of our boat had to meet the seas head on, and they broke over us continually while we pitched and tossed in an alarming manner, but I was so numbed that I seemed incapable of experiencing any further sensations.

It was not until we had dropped anchor and were once more secure that I recalled the crash which had taken place below and we started to investigate the cause.

The table at which we had been sitting when the storm burst on us had been overturned, three of the legs were smashed, every article of crockery broken, making a scene of indescribable confusion. We opened the doors

of the cabin, and stepping into space I fell with a thud to the floor, ricking my shoulder badly and twisting my ankle. The angle at which the boat had been flung time and again had wrenched the steps from their fastenings and hurled them to the other end of the cabin.

I was lifted into the cock-pit, and as it was impossible for me to walk ashore I had to be ignominiously carried.

Later in the evening we talked over our recent battle with the elements.

"I told you so!" I said, getting some of my own back. "Now will you believe in premonitions?"

I have not been back to Melones since, and hope never again to see that island of evil omen, except in the distance—and a considerable distance at that!

CHAPTER XI

ANOTHER EXPEDITION—TWENTY-FOOT CROCODILES AT CLOSE QUARTERS

OUR journey into the Chucunaque country and the strenuous life we had been compelled to live, coupled with the strain of hauling on big fish, had told on us so severely that a visit to the doctor in Panama was necessary, and after a thorough examination he extracted a reluctant promise that we would take it easy and not exert ourselves for a few weeks, warning us that otherwise the consequences might be serious. Midge was suffering from what is known as athletic heart, so here was an excellent opportunity for us to explore the surrounding islands and country.

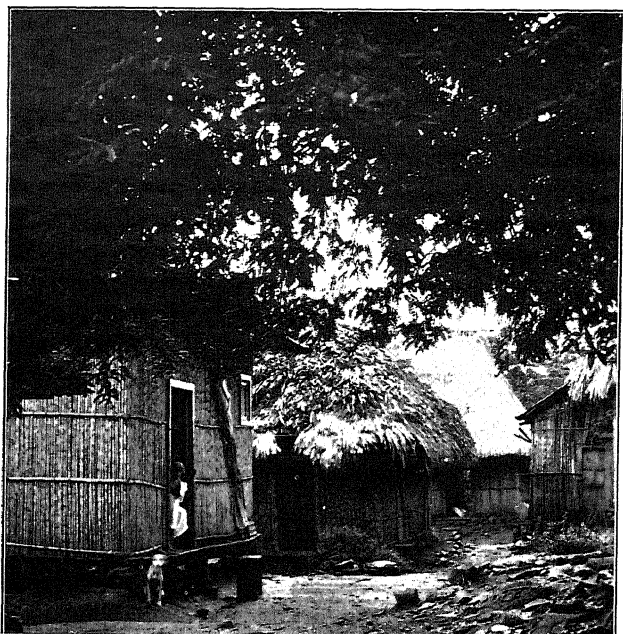
We determined to visit Otoque and Bona, but whilst running out there I could not resist the temptation of trolling with a Wilson spoon, and off the Valladolid Rock struck and landed a 40-pound jack, when I had the rod taken from me.

"Doctor's orders," Midge reminded me peremptorily.

Arriving at Otoque in a sea of glass we passed through a deep channel, and on one of the islands discovered a wonderful cave into which the sea flowed. We tried to penetrate this in the dinghy, but found it impossible owing to the heavy swell.

On Otoque is a tiny village, though why anyone should live on a small island like this out in the Pacific, miles from the mainland, I cannot understand.

Afterwards we ran out to the mouth of the Chamé



VILLAGE ON PEARL ISLANDS (p. 231).



River, and negotiating the sand-bars off the entrance found ourselves in a broad estuary—a safe anchorage in every way, the river bed and banks being all pure sand. The country on the mainland side was very interesting, innumerable sea birds making the shallow water just off some miniature islets their fishing ground, while a little way inland parrots and parrakeets were in abundance. On the densely wooded side of the mountains a few miles back, where a white person had probably never set foot, an old native told me jaguar and tiger-cat roamed at will, while farther up the river were many large alligators.

Not long after this we visited the Pearl Islands, 40 miles from the mainland, though the weather was so atrocious we were glad to get back again. Quantities of valuable pearls are found here and constitute the chief industry of the natives.

We determined to run over to Panama City for a day or two for a change, and while there the Minister of Finance, Dr. Eusibio Morales, strongly advised us to explore the Bayano River,

This was an ambitious project, but after discussion we made up our minds to attempt it.

As before, the boat was loaded up with stores and petrol, and eventually we set out.

We passed Taboguilla on the ocean side, accompanied by a school of large porpoises which played round our bow, gambolling playfully alongside us for some miles ; many must have weighed 1,000 pounds each.

After a run of about two hours we faintly picked up the island of Chepillo. Away to starboard we could see, like a puff of smoke on the horizon, one of the outer sentinels of the Pearl Islands. At least 20 miles from the mouth we struck the current of the Bayano River, which made an oily lane through the sea, and by following this we arrived at the entrance in the afternoon.

We were at once confronted with a formidable diffi-

culty. Reef and sand-bar stretched completely across the mouth. But the hazard had to be faced.

Up to now most of our navigation had been simplified by the clearness of the water, which was now denied us, any attempt to estimate the depth being foiled by the thick yellow flood rushing out to sea. Choosing a likely-looking opening—a natural break in a sharp-fanged wicked-looking limestone reef—we went ahead dead slow, with Robbie in the bow swinging the lead. I was congratulating myself that we were through when—bump! bump!—a long shivering grind that ended in a rasping wrench—it was as if some marine monster had taken us within its massive jaws and was crunching and shaking us. Had we not been going dead slow the bottom would have been torn out of the yacht. I held my breath, expecting to hear the water rushing in. Fast aground, with the tide rapidly ebbing, it seemed a certainty that this time our well-beloved little boat was indeed lost.

I missed the usual violent explosion from Midge. It is impossible to foretell what anyone will do under stress of circumstances. I distinctly heard him humming "When you come to the end of a perfect day" under his breath. When he had finished, he smiled cheerfully and said :

"Here we are, and as far as the boat is concerned, I think for good!"

The water dropped rapidly, and as it fell the angle at which we were leaning over became perilously acute, so that at last it seemed certain that we should lie on one side, but this, which would have been an utter disaster, was prevented by the rocky bottom giving a certain amount of support as we heeled over. When only a few inches remained, in spite of the muddy colour I could see we were stranded on solid limestone. Three-quarters of an hour more and we were high and dry.

We clambered down the side to examine what we

expected would be a badly shattered hull, but discovered that the damage was not so serious as feared, only one of the copper plates being torn off the bottom, the propeller badly bent, with two or three pieces knocked out of the blades.

"You'll soon be able to straighten this out with a hammer and make it more or less serviceable," I said.

"If we can ever get out of this Hampton Court maze, what about going on?" asked Midge.

"I'm game for anything," I answered.

The tide turned just as dusk was falling and commenced to run up, but by the time the boat, quivering and bumping, floated off it was pitch dark. The current was running up at a tremendous pace; it would have been madness to start the engine, so Robbie and our native boy rowed ahead in the dinghy with a rope fast to the capstan of the yacht, guiding her as best they could.

Our misfortunes, however, were not over. A hundred yards or so farther on we ran aground again. By the smothered soft feeling, I knew it was sand this time, and felt quite happy, imagining that at least we were safe there, but I was fooled, for the heavy water of the river meeting the in-coming tide, we at once commenced to roll heavily, and bumped in a dull, shattering way even more alarming than when we were on the rocks from which we had mercifully drifted clear.

It was a tremendous relief when this second danger was averted and we again found ourselves drifting on through a wall of blackness.

"Hopeless!" exclaimed Midge. "As certain as we're alive we're going to smash on something else. Drop the anchor!"

When this had been done, we knew by the depth that we should have to face the horror of being stranded on the low tide before morning. In desperation we lit one of our red distress-signal flares, and ten minutes later

another, continuing to do so at intervals. I was suddenly startled by a loud hail, which seemed to come from nowhere, and was never more thankful than when I saw two black shapes creep up the side on to the deck. Two natives who lived on the island of Chepillo and had witnessed our misfortunes had paddled out to our rescue in a little dug-out. They looked like demons from the pit of Acheron, children of Satan come to mock us in our misfortune, but in reality they were angels of deliverance.

Their knowledge of English was limited, for their first remark made me laugh, in spite of the gravity of our position.

"You all happy, sah?" they enquired.

I don't think Midge at this trying moment quite appreciated their unconscious humour.

"We damned happy all right," he said to me in an undertone. But they were really splendid fellows, and the way they took over the navigation of the boat in the atramental surroundings was nothing short of astounding. Sitting either side of Midge, who was at the wheel, and traversing what appeared to be a fistulate labyrinth of channels, after over an hour they signalled to drop anchor, though where on earth we were was more than I could fathom. We had doubled and twisted backwards and forwards until I imagined it was more than likely the ocean lay beneath us again.

They had been jabbering one to the other all the time in a language unknown to me, and they now proved that their knowledge of English was even slighter than I had imagined, for one of them turned to me and starting off in much the same way as he had greeted us, added:

"Jesus Christ, you happy, sah?"

This was said in a very pleased way and without the slightest touch of profanity, being merely intended to convey his earnest desire to tell me that all was now well.

When day broke we found we were in the mouth of

a broad river, but looking towards the sea the daylight showed us the tortuous passages we had passed through to reach the deep water where we were now moored. There appeared to be nothing but sand shoals, and we knew for certain that we should never have been able to steer through them without a pilot, even by day.

Losing no time we proceeded upstream, arriving off a tiny village, if it can be dignified by such a name, the miserable reed and thatch huts being set on a stinking mud flat. Eaten alive by mosquitoes and sand flies in this reeking, malarious place, the poor creatures living here, who seemed hardly human, live out their years knowing nothing, seeing nothing, thinking nothing.

As a woman, a great feeling of pity passed over me when I thought of tiny children being brought into the world under such terrible conditions. Deeply touched, I suggested that we should stop.

I beckoned to them, and a remnant of a dug-out came timidly alongside. We gave them some biscuits and tins of corned beef, for which their gratitude and pleasure were out of all proportion—really painful—it made me feel ashamed. One hears much of a beneficent Providence; but what can be the reason that some are born in such surroundings, while others come into the world surrounded by every luxury and ease that unlimited wealth can provide?

At the time I thought it impossible that worse conditions could prevail anywhere, but recently two travellers were describing their experiences on the Chili-Bolivian border. They told me they came to a part of the country that had suffered an unprecedented period of drought. Amidst the barren sunbaked tract dwelt a small tribe of Indians, their sufferings indescribable. The graphic description of the dogs will convey better than anything else an idea of the privations of the people. They noticed the emaciated animals feebly and noiselessly opening and shutting their mouths as they

entered the village, and wherever they went the dogs did the same. They asked what was the matter with the canine population, and were aghast when the Indians informed them that they were barking. They were in such a terrible state of starvation that they had only strength enough to open and close the mouth and could make no noise.

This story may sound like a traveller's yarn, but considering the source from which it came, I believe it to be true.

Leaving the little village we continued upstream. I expected to see alligators every second, but there was no sign, though several times I saw iguanos on the banks, while a 7-foot snake, wriggling across the water, caught my eye as we passed.

The densely wooded banks were a super-botanical gardens. No painting could give the faintest impression of the blending of colour or the barbaric splendour of the tropics. The hibiscus and several other well-known flowering plants and bushes I already knew, but there were quantities I had never seen before, while the mangrove trees were gigantic, towering 80 to 100 feet in the air. The way in which these trees root is a remarkable sight—the branches high in the air shoot out a tuber, which grows downwards till in time it reaches the water and, entering the mud, roots there, so that finally this unique manner of growth forms an interlaced mass through which it is impossible to force one's way. The roots of a mangrove tree make me think of the tentacles of an octopus. It has a peculiar marshy smell entirely its own, and one's nose always gives warning of the danger, for among them dwell the deadly anopheles—the species of mosquito which science has discovered to be the prime cause of malaria fever. It is an interesting fact that only the female is responsible, the male being quite harmless.

Apart from malaria, carried by the anopheles, the

miasma from the mangrove swamps produces an ague and low fever, as well as pains in all the joints very like rheumatism.

The Rockefeller Institutes are doing great work in helping medical science to discover and combat many of these diseases. The practical stamping out of yellow fever, and the serious tackling of the hook-worm problem (which is the curse of the majority of the children throughout Central America and the West Indies) are splendid examples of how medical knowledge has progressed in the last few years.

We stopped about 12 miles up the river at the mouth of a little creek, and decided to explore this in the dinghy. It looked an ideal place for alligators, yet I was disappointed; although we persevered and rowed up to where the stream narrowed and became so shallow that we could not go any farther. Our efforts, however, were rewarded in one sense, for we shot some curlew-like ducks, which when cooked did not taste in the least fishy, but were very fine eating.

Two miles beyond this, on the same side, was another creek, and just before we reached it Midge pointed out some long, dirty grey shapes, which looked like old gnarled logs lying partially buried in the mud. Instinctively I knew what they were before a hideous head reared up, while a long body slithered beneath the water. The other “ logs ” followed suit.

We anchored off the mouth of this creek, which was, no doubt, a happy hunting-ground for “ crocodiles,” and without troubling to leave the yacht made good practice with the rifle on several of the evil-looking reptiles.

The mangroves at the mouth of the creek were evidently the nightly resting place of numbers of birds. It was delightful to see them flocking in until the trees facing us were weighed down with their thousands.

I have no mercy for crocodiles and alligators, and in

the battle we waged against them during the next day or two we accounted for five mighty specimens, ranging from 18 feet 6 inches to 23 feet in length.

On returning from the top of the little streamlet, in rounding a corner we saw on a mud flat, basking in the sun, fifteen of the sinister brutes. We could have easily killed a couple, but the consequences in our little dinghy would probably have been disastrous, so we refrained from attacking. It was no use taking unnecessary and absurd risks, but near where it opened into the main river I nearly fell a victim to a large crocodile Midge fired at and thought he had killed.

It is often difficult to take a good aim, as they assimilate so closely to the mud bank on which they lie, but this time a heavy surge of water, and mud flying into the air made me think the bullet had found a vital spot. We were, however, woefully mistaken, and to cut short a story which has already appeared in many papers, it is only necessary for me to add that the enraged creature rose beneath the dinghy, first nearly upsetting us, and then attacked—its jaws agape, giving me an excellent, though unsolicited demonstration of the fact that alligators are without tonsils.

It was only when all was over that I realised the unconscious change that had taken place in my character since leaving England. I am quite sure, prior to my initiation to the life of the wilds, I should have fainted at such a situation, but the law of self-preservation had now become the dominating factor in life, and therefore take no credit for the fact that my nerve did not fail at this critical moment, and that it was with no hesitation I fired with my automatic into the gaping jaws so close to me. It was a question of must, or pay the penalty.

We shot no more from the dinghy that day, for reasons which will doubtless be appreciated, but from the security of the *Cara's* deck killed five crocodiles.

Since my return there has been a controversy as to whether these great reptiles up the Bayano River were crocodiles or alligators. The photographs which we took, and which are very clear in detail, were shown to the Fellows of the Zoological Society at the time that Mr. Mitchell Hedges lectured there. It was unanimously agreed that they were undoubtedly crocodiles. Apart from being much larger than alligators, there are other differences readily recognised by those who have made a study of the matter, but they are so technical that, even if qualified to do so, it would take up too much space, though I might add that alligators also are plentiful in many rivers in Central America.

CHAPTER XII

HABITS OF CROCODILES AND ALLIGATORS IN THEIR NATURAL HOME—NIGHT HUNTING IN THE MYSTERIOUS WILDS

MANY people who live in the colder climates of the world and have never had an opportunity of visiting the tropics, can have no knowledge of the habits of crocodiles and alligators in their natural home. To see the quiet, sluggish, and apparently peaceful reptiles basking lazily and contentedly in the Zoo conveys the impression that their movements are as slow and sleepy as they appear. The sight of one in captivity moving a few feet is rare ; but they are very different creatures when necessity compels them to search and hunt for their food in their secluded swamp and river fastnesses.

I must destroy the popular belief in their slothfulness. The outward appearance of the alligator and crocodile can best be described as a mixture of cowardice, stealth, craft, and slowness of action which entirely belies its rapidity of movement, and is part of the reptile's cunning.

During the breeding season they deposit their eggs from 6 to 18 inches beneath the sand, where they are left, the heat of the sun hatching out the young in due course.

The eggs are usually laid within a few yards of a swamp or river, but never so far away but that the male or female, or both, can keep constant watch over the nest from their lair. The best way to discover the eggs is to take a stick 4 or 5 feet long and keep thrusting

it into the sand until a soft spot is encountered. Then scrape down with the hands and the clutch will be found. They are pure white and elongated, the egg slightly larger than that of the duck, though the shell appears exactly like china. Take a couple of the eggs out, break them, and throw the contents into the near-by morass or stream, and there will not be long to wait.

Be wise and retreat a few yards with rifle in readiness ; although, so far as may be seen, the surroundings appear deserted by any of the reptiles, yet slowly a dark mass will appear—apparently from nowhere—first the head and back until the full length is exposed.

It will commence to draw close, though by a peculiar movement of its own it is impossible to pick out any definite or distinguishing feature as it advances. The stealthiness is remarkable—foot by foot, and yet nearer it creeps. Do not retreat, but stand quite still. I admit this requires a great deal of nerve, for if ever anything in this world breathes vindictive hate it is an alligator or crocodile advancing in this manner, with a deadliness of purpose which is unmistakable. The reptile pauses—then moves nearer almost by inches. There is a deliberate method in this—it is actually measuring the distance—and then comes the critical moment. It stops dead—its eyes still continue to gaze fixedly, very much like a snake hypnotising its victim. Watch the back legs very carefully—they will both be seen to come closer to the front. Don't wait another second—fire. If you miss, nothing in the world can save you.

The brute when it finally stops will be approximately 20 to 30 feet (according to its size) away, and in exact opposition to the sluggish manner in which it has sinuously stalked up to now, these last few feet will be covered with lightning rapidity, deadly in its suddenness—so much so that unless a person is well versed in the habits of the creatures, it is almost a certainty that he will be thrown off his guard, and taken so much by

surprise that, even if he has time to fire, it is more than likely that he will miss in the excitement of the moment, and there will be no time for a second shot.

Exactly in the same way unsuspecting human beings or animals on land are attacked. Some years ago Mr. Mitchell Hedges had a native boy for whom he had a great affection, and it was while he was hunting alligators in a country adjoining the Caribbean that an awful tragedy took place.

The surroundings were almost exactly as I have described—swamp, sandy bank, and time the breeding season. As is usual with all natives, if there is a shady piece of sand they will lie down at every opportunity and fall fast asleep. This boy had been warned many times to be careful, but in spite of this, although he knew perfectly well that the sand-bank in question was the nesting ground for the numerous reptiles in the vicinity, yet he would persist in dropping off to sleep in this one spot—the very last he should have chosen ; and then the inevitable happened.

Mr. Mitchell Hedges's tent was about 100 yards away. He heard agonised cries, and dashed out just in time to see that the boy had been seized by the legs by one of the loathsome brutes, which had approached in the noiseless and stealthy manner previously described. The alligator, dragging its victim, had already reached the water. Help was out of the question, for with a frightful shriek, ending in a gurgle, the boy's head disappeared beneath the surface, to be seen no more, for the saurian always takes its prey to its own particular feeding hole, to consume after death at leisure.

It will therefore be realised that the sight of ten or fifteen alligators basking on a muddy bank, every now and then moving a head or tail in the laziest way, gives one quite a false impression. Fire a bullet among them and in a flash they will shoot off and disappear beneath the water.

I have said they are cowardly—here again they present two sides to their character. Suppose someone walking through the bush were to stumble over one of the reptiles—it would immediately slither away; I have never heard of a single instance where they turned and attacked when surprised in this manner. However, were one to sit down and bathe in a stream, wade in shallow water, or fall asleep where they are plentiful, it would be another story—the brutes somehow know there is no need to dash for cover. Secure in the knowledge that they are indistinguishable beneath the water, this is when they choose to seize their victim. They seem to have an almost uncanny instinct of knowing when no defence can be put up.

I cannot do better than describe what happened to the Costa Rican schooner *Gandoca*. This 30-ton boat, which was fitted with a heavy gasoline motor, in performing its regular passage between Bocas del Toro, Panama, and Port Limon, Costa Rica, was wrecked on the bar of the Sixaola river on the night of December 10, 1923. She had sixteen persons on board, including the crew. Immediately off the Sixaola, where there are dangerous sand-banks, the motor failed. Driven by the wind she was soon among the breakers. Her rudder broke off, leaving her at the mercy of the heavy seas in the danger zone. Grinding and smashing on the sand she suddenly capsized, but nearly all those on board had already been washed overboard.

There were only four survivors who witnessed the most dreadful sights one could imagine, and this illustrates why I have ventured to suggest that crocodiles and alligators have an uncanny instinct when they can attack in perfect safety.

The Sixaola swarms with very large crocodiles, and on being rescued, the survivors reported their gruesome and terrible experience, and the ghastly sights they had seen.

When the passengers and crew were flung into the water, they were shortly attacked by numbers of waiting reptiles, who fought over them and tore them to pieces before the horrified eyes of those who looked on, unable to do anything and momentarily expecting the same fate.

We continued up the Bayano to where the Mamoni, which is in itself quite a big river, joins the main stream. I cannot say how far the Mamoni runs inland. We went up some way, the forest and swamp on either side being quite flat and—for this part of the world—uninteresting as far as we went, but judging by the configuration of the country I should think its source originates in the mountainous range which can be seen distinctly although many miles distant.

Ten miles up the Bayano, beyond this junction of the two rivers, was a native settlement called Jesus Maria, while still farther on was another collection of huts known as El Llano, but we could not stop at either place, as, although 25 miles from the Pacific, the river still remained tidal. On the ebb the water rushes out, making rapids and whirlpools, and drops so much that we would have found ourselves once more bumping on the rocky bottom. However, it was through visiting these places that we gained information which I know to be authentic beyond question.

As an instance of how little is known or suspected of the *hinterland* of Central America, by the lucky chance of a visit of some Indians, who only come down on very rare occasions to Jesus Maria and El Llano, we discovered that towards—one might almost say actually running into—a vast range of mountains there is a river. Alternating with deep silent stretches it thunders over great boulders until a mighty gorge is reached, the cliffs rising at least a thousand feet sheer on either side, while dimly below the river rushes in cataracts and waterfalls.

On the top of the great cliffs lies a primeval forest with very little undergrowth—solemn, gloomy, and unknown. What wild beasts roam freely within the depths of this sepulchral forest none can say, but from what we were told there is little doubt that the black jaguar, commonly known as the black tiger, is reasonably common, while where the river gorge ends and the country becomes more open, large numbers of tapir live and wallow in peace, free from the hunter.

We heard some remarkably circumstantial tales of huge boa constrictors large enough to encircle and crush an ox into pulp. How far this forest extends I do not know, but I have a feeling that in spite of the many difficulties that would have to be surmounted and undoubted privations endured, I should like to explore it and see what this land of mystery contains. After finding a race of Indians like the Chucunague, nothing would surprise me.

We ran back down the river and found an excellent anchorage in the deep water close alongside the bank a few miles below.

This country was different from anything we had seen up to now, and opened out for some distance before reaching the edge of the bush which widely encircled it. It was curious to find a space like this, perhaps a couple of miles long by half a mile broad—a most tempting camping ground.

After being continually on board a little yacht one became so cramped that it was a joy to stretch one's legs. As soon as we had crossed the open space and entered the jungle, it was plain that this was a big-game hunter's paradise; the spoor of the numerous members of the cat family was everywhere impressed where the soft ground would take the mark, as were those of wild pigs and many other animals. Several species of monkeys were to be seen among the trees, and for some time I watched the antics of a small white-faced family

swinging from branch to branch, chattering and grimacing at one another, whilst the howling and barking of the well-named howler apes were incessant as evening drew near ; the forest echoed with the noise when they called and answered from both long and short range, while the vocal efforts of what I judged to be the leader stood out above the rest, his roars being terrific.

That night Midge went out alone with his rifle and spot-light, but returned having had no luck. He tried again at daybreak with better success, killing a wild pig.

Sleeping through the day, at dusk we both made up our minds to take our rifles and spot-lights and go up one of the near-by streams on chance.

A spot-light is an excellent device—an acetylene lamp, the charge and water being carried in a receptacle hung in the belt. From thence a tube runs to a circular leather band which fits round the head, and on this band is fixed a lamp with a reflector. The rays penetrate the darkness straight ahead from the forehead, and encountering the beams the eyes of any of the reptile family flash vivid red, while the leopard, jaguar, or any members of the cat family are at once distinguishable by the way their eyes flash green.

The great advantage of hunting in this way is that both hands are free, and the rifle can be brought into necessary rapid action without one's movements being impeded, while an excellent sight can be obtained by the flashing eyes.

Not the slightest breath of air stirred the leaves as the sun sank ; twenty minutes later the heavens were suffused with the roseate afterglow, to be followed by fuliginous night. We softly entered the dinghy and as softly paddled away.

To be in a tiny boat amidst utterly unknown surroundings always gives one an uncanny feeling. One seems impelled to do everything as quietly as possible, unconsciously becoming in tune with the atmosphere—

to make a jarring noise would almost seem desecration. It is remarkable how one's eyes get accustomed to the dark. Feeling our way up the river I soon distinguished the opening where a small stream branched off that I am quite sure at home I should never have seen. We glided into it. The vegetation formed a dense canopy overhead, adding further to the impenetrable gloom. Shipping oars, Midge sat in the stern and used a short paddle, gently propelling the boat in this way. We both lit our lamps, and within the radius of their brilliant beams everything was clear as day.

A little farther on, silently putting his finger to his lips he motioned to the left. I turned my light in that direction. Two eyes, vivid and unblinking, flashed scarlet. I had my rifle in instant readiness.

"'Sh!" he whispered, slowly shaking his head. Nearer and nearer we crept. The nose of the boat touched the mud without sound—the immobile eyes were within half a dozen feet of me; it was most uncomfortable. Every moment I expected a mighty movement on the part of the creature—still the same deadly silence, still the unblinking scarlet eyes were fixed on me, never wavering. The paddle pushing against my back distracted my attention.

"Put your rifle down! Hold the boat firm," came the whisper.

Midge crept out of the boat stealthily, advanced a few feet, and then his hand shot down.

"Got him!" he said, and as he crept back into the dinghy I saw he was holding an enormous frog, its hind legs slashed with deep red. It was astonishing to think that the eyes of so small (in comparison with the other inhabitants of the jungle) a creature could seem so large and malevolent in the rays of the light. These frogs must be plentiful in this part of the world, for within the next 100 yards or so we saw quite a dozen more—and then I thought I must surely be dreaming, for

suddenly two great scarlet orbs, which appeared to me as large as an orange, flashed in the light.

"Leave it alone; we've had enough of crocodiles," said Midge.

Immediately after sighting this creature, I flashed something totally different. The thunder of my rifle on the silence of the night was nerve-shattering. I then held the boat against the bank by the root of a tree while Midge climbed up to find whether I had missed or not. I saw him bend down and commence to drag something, then jerk upright while the sharp bark of his automatic rang out. He then continued dragging the object along, lowering it carefully into the dinghy. I had killed a magnificently marked ocelot.

"It wasn't quite dead," he told me, "so I finished it off."

I think he rather anticipated that I should want to return to the yacht, for he said:

"Don't let's go back yet; it's wonderful up here."

It was indeed wonderful, and I was full of the excitement of not knowing what we might encounter. All the time we could hear rustling movements, both great and small, among the undergrowth. We later came on a herd of wild hogs—at least thirty—but having plenty of meat on board we left them in peace, being really after jaguar, or one of the larger cats. I am certain that I caught sight of one, but had no chance to fire.

It is extraordinary to think that during the day one can go up a stream like this without seeing any signs of life, and yet at night the bush seems to be alive with animals.

It must have been well after midnight before we started our return journey. We flashed several more crocodiles, and Midge stopped to get two more big frogs; but apart from this no further excitement awaited us, and when we came alongside the boat had made up our minds to hunt the jungle next day, night work being

much more dangerous on land than from a boat, owing to snakes.

Hunting by day has not the same fascination as night work. All members of the cat family, and in fact nearly all the denizens of the jungle, retire to their lairs as soon as the sun rises.

As was to be expected, we saw several snakes, while in among the trees numbers of birds were flitting with the most brilliant plumage, while the butterflies were simply gorgeous—among them the bright blue insect from the wings of which so much jewellery is made in the form of brooches and pendants. Their wings when flying are opalescent, but to see a dozen or more settle on some tropical fruit full ripe that has fallen to the ground must be a personal experience to be appreciated—the sun, catching the metallic blue of their wings, displays their brilliant colour in its full intensity.

The juice of ripe fruit holds a particular attraction for this species, and while they are at work extracting it, one can get quite close to them, and if finally disturbed they only fly a few feet off to collapse again, hopelessly drunk.

We saw several specimens of the smaller ant bear and armadillos. This strange-looking, edentated quadruped has its body armed with bands of bony plates, though the head, which protrudes from beneath, rather like that of the common hedge-hog, is velvety soft with a snout like a pig. One thing we discovered to our bitter cost—that the country round contained a virulently poisonous tick indistinguishable with the naked eye, though under a microscope it appears a cochineal red, and it was meeting with this that brought our exploration of the Bayano to an abrupt close.

CHAPTER XIII

THE AFTERMATH OF THE BAYANO—BACK FROM THE UNKNOWN TO CIVILISATION

ON the fourth day after we had made the open space our camping ground, I began to suffer from an excruciating itch—so bad that sleep was out of the question. Midge was similarly affected, and the next day I developed fever. By night my temperature was 103, rising rapidly to over 104. I was so bad that in the grey morning Midge decided to throw all caution to the winds and risking everything, dashed full speed down the river. By the greatest piece of good luck we arrived safely at the mouth, but the dangers at the entrance, and the way in which he managed to clear the sand-bars and reefs between us and the ocean, were of no interest to me, for by this time I was delirious. He told me later that my face was so swollen that the eyes were completely closed, while my arms and legs were suffused with a scarlet rash. All recollections of this terrible time are, however, very vague, and when I recovered sufficiently to sit up and take notice, I found myself in bed.

My discomfort was acute and my protruding, swollen lips were so thickened and cracked in several places that even to speak made them bleed. It was well over a week before the fever subsided.

This poisonous tick, or red bug, is first cousin to the irritating creature which often abounds during the summer on chalk downs in England, though the poison of the tropical species is so much more virulent that one can hardly compare them. However, the English

variety is sufficiently unpleasant to make it a force to be reckoned with. Some years ago some people I knew, after picnicking on the Chiltern Hills near Tring, found to their cost that they had been attacked by this parasitical insect. Owing to the intense itch sleep was an impossibility for nights, and the inflammatory rash was attended by fever which lasted some days.

The after-effects of the poison of the Bayano red bug caused me to have intermittent fever for many weeks, while my body, after the rash had disappeared, was suffused all over with yellow and blue patches—bruised as if thrashed with a heavy stick. It was a fortnight before I was well enough to take an interest in anything, but during my little strolls while convalescing I found a colony of frogs so extraordinary-looking that they are well worthy of mention. They were very like ivy leaves—beautifully green-veined little fellows, but at night they could make a surprisingly loud noise for their size. When I return to Taboga—as is my hope—I shall try to bring some home with me, together with a few tarantulas and lizards, which I believe would live in a conservatory.

We were feeling much in need of rest after our months of strenuous exertion, and had made up our minds to return to England with the huge collection that had accumulated, but felt that we must just for once defy the doctor's orders, and have one more go at the big fish. In this attempt we were lucky; it bore out the old saying that the last cast in the evening often produces the biggest fish of the day, and although this was not quite the same, yet it was our last day's fishing.

We left Taboguilla in the *Cara*, anchoring on our favourite mark—the rocky point off Taboguilla. We had only been fishing for a very short time when we brought alongside a 14-foot shovel-nose shark weighing round

All my life I have been told that I am psychic, and to-day had a firm presentiment that we were going to strike into something out of the common.

"We're going to do something abnormal to-day," I told Midge.

"Hope to God it won't be running on a reef or getting eaten alive with red bugs," he replied.

Even though he knows how often my presentiments come true, he still laughs at me.

"You wait and see," I said; "in a little while we're going to smash into the greatest fish we've ever hooked."

"Good egg!" he replied, impressed in spite of himself.

Presently the slack of the starboard line slowly commenced to leave the deck.

"Here's the big fish," I said.

When the end of the line was reached the strain on the capstan was terrific, the rope creaking as if it must burst. We had forgotten to give the order for the anchor to be hauled up, but that made no difference, for it was wrenched out of the ground and the *Cara* went ahead, towed by an irresistible force hidden beneath the surface.

The hours that followed were full of excitement. How it circled round Panama Bay and came to the top thrashing the water with its flukes, the great saw cutting to right and left with a force that would instantly kill anything within reach. What a battle! It nearly culminated in disaster, for at the last, when we thought the fish was played out and they attempted to get a rope ashore in the dinghy to work it up on the beach, it came to life again, overturning the frail craft and flinging Midge, Robbie, and our native boy into the water—a water infested with sharks. Always numerous, they were now very much in evidence, attracted by the blood oozing from the wound in the saw-fish's mouth caused by the 14-pound hook. It seemed an age before

they all three swam to the safety of the yacht, where I helped them on board.

I was shuddering the whole time with dread that I might see a dorsal fin cut the water, to be followed by the sight of one of them bitten in half in front of my eyes.

It gave me some idea of how Mr. Manley Lopez must have felt when he saw his own daughter killed in this frightful way in Kingston Harbour, only a few yards away from where he stood on shore. I can understand why he carries the living horror of it always and will do so as long as he lives.

The fish had made off with our dinghy, water-logged, but still bobbing up and down in its wake. We quickly started up the engine and went in pursuit, with much difficulty manœuvring so that this leviathan was attached with a rope to our capstan again, while our recovered dinghy was in its accustomed place astern, minus the bottom boards and oars.

Over five hours elapsed from the time we first hooked this great saw-fish to finally beaching it, and next day I was able to get a good series of snapshots. No doubt many have already seen these photographs, as they have been published in most of the leading newspapers throughout the world.

When Midge performed the autopsy, he found it was a female and the mother of thirty-six young. We were able to preserve these in spirit and got them to England, when it was a great pleasure to present specimens to the Natural History Museum, South Kensington, the Royal College of Surgeons Museum, and the British Sea Anglers' Society.

Up to then there had been no exhibits of foetal saw-fish, and scientifically those we were able to present added considerably to the knowledge of the habits and birth of these fish. It was previously thought that the saw developed after birth, but these embryo-fish proved

conclusively that the saw-fish is born with saw complete, even to the teeth on either side.

This was the finish so far as our fishing and exploration were concerned. Carefully replacing the whole of our collection on board the *Cara*, we left Taboga for Panama.

We experienced the greatest courtesy from the United States Government officials, who kindly took charge of our little yacht, and without any formalities in the way of port duties or dock charges, moored her in the secluded safety of the pool adjoining the Government shops at Balboa.

I feel sure this policy of broad-minded consideration is largely responsible for the advancement, both scientifically and commercially, of the great American nation. I have never found any jealousies existing, and although it was well known that the benefits of any discoveries we might have made would naturally go to the credit of our own country, the Americans with whom we came in contact were invariably willing to co-operate and lend a hand. If a definite link of unity could be forged between the great English-speaking nations, I cannot help feeling it would be a force productive of much good—powerful and unassailable.

We made the International Hotel at Panama our headquarters, our arrival synchronising with the Carnival.

We had been through so much and among the wilds for so long that I took a childish pleasure in all the festivities.

As is usual, the Queen is balloted for, the choice being between six of the fairest maidens of Panama, and the voting is published every day in the *Star and Herald*. As the time for the final result of the poll approaches, the excitement of the people rises to fever heat, though the sportsmanlike and friendly rivalry of all sections would do credit to any country.

The coloured population also vote for their Queen, and



MAYA QUICHE WOMAN, BRITISH HONDURAS (p. 260).

during the Carnival the entire city is given up to holiday, business being at a standstill. The streets from end to end are decorated with streamers and garlands, while at night the whole is illuminated with thousands of coloured electric bulbs, the Plaza especially being a wonderful sight. Everyone wears fancy dress and for weeks previously stage-like scenes have been in process of construction on the motor lorries with which Panama is so plentifully supplied. There is a grand procession, over a mile in length, in which thousands take part, after which the Queen, her Ladies, and Courtiers dance the Tamborita, first at the Hotel Central and later at the palatial Union Club, while the cabarets, packed full, roar till early morning.

The Carnival lasts for three days—and nights ; the festival then subsides, as do most of the population.

The yacht being much too small to navigate across the Atlantic, a cradle was constructed, and arrangements made whereby she would be raised bodily by the 75-ton cranes of the Panama Canal and placed on board one of the big freighters for England, but it was impossible for me to travel with her. This entailed my leaving some days prior to Midge.

The first day out I had a touch of fever which developed into the worst attack of malaria I had ever had—much more severe than in the wilds.

I arrived at Liverpool on a typically English spring morning—not the kind the poets write about, but with an icy cold wind and deluge of rain, and later went to Southampton to meet the boat which was conveying the *Cara* and our treasured collection—also Robbie, who had stuck to the ship to the very last.

I was quite embarrassed at the small army of press and camera men who were waiting the ship's arrival. Her coming into dock made an impression in more ways than one for—no doubt owing to the strong current—she was unable to turn in time to pass through the narrow

entrance, and crashed bow on to the masonry. A policeman grabbed me and flung me back as the rivets shot out from her plates like bullets, and later I saw she was damaged pretty badly, but fortunately above the water-line.

Owing to the kindness of Mr. Gordon Selfridge, who despatched a motor lorry to Southampton, our treasures arrived safely in London, and after that I retired to Cornwall to keep my promise to Mr. Milsted that I would try to place on record my voyage to the unknown.



CARIB INDIANS, GUATEMALA (p. 260).

CHAPTER XIV

PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

LEADING scientists, on careful examination of all the objects with which we have returned, have come to the unanimous decision that the Chucunaque Indians were pre-Stone and Iron, there being no trace of any metal or stone in general usage—with one exception. The women, as can be seen in the photographs, all wore gold nose-rings. These are not modern, and, therefore, the only conclusion to which I can come is that they have been handed down as heirlooms from former generations.

After the collection had been classified and tabulated on our return to England, it was found that the principal objects comprised approximately 1,600 squares of hieroglyphic picture-writing on cloth, over 900 barbaric necklaces made entirely of animal and human teeth, children's fingers and other small bones.

Many of these teeth and portions of bone are quite unknown to science, and it has been suggested that the animals or reptiles from which they were taken are now extinct. One necklace consists of forty-six sabre-like teeth averaging over 4 inches in length. Suspended from another is an ivory tusk pendant, which puzzled various scientists, but the South Kensington Natural History Museum authorities eventually solved the problem and pronounce it to be the tooth of a whale.

There are in round numbers a hundred gods—no two alike, their carved modelling exhibiting a remarkably diversified range. Some depict a figure with a top-hat

and frock-coat, the detail varying in each ; others are winged, and in one instance double-headed. Again, there is a female hooded figure, while two resemble the Sphinx.

A knowledge of the old Spanish Conquistadores is shown by the fact that one of these wooden deities is a carved replica of the dress worn at that period.

All types of their weapons numbering hundreds are represented, from the great 9-foot bows with the deadly-looking quintuple arrows, to quite small examples—two-handed clubs, smaller, single-knobbed ones, and their short spear-shaped cutting instruments.

There is also the entire outfit of the head contoolie, or medicine man, comprising his numerous bone necklaces, the wands and feather neck-dress used only at the wailing ceremony of the dead, his regalia including the towering feathered head-dress.

There are a number of fine oriental pearls with which they presented us—pink, black, and rose-pink ; the perfectly preserved foetus ; reed musical instruments and a quantity of basket work—crude, yet beautifully woven in wonderful patterns, the fans being used to drive away the flies from irritating sick Indians as they lie in their hammocks.

There are innumerable other specimens, a full description of which might be wearisome.

Time and again I have tried to analyse the mystery of this strange people. From the Texas-Mexican Border to Tierra del Fuego surely this vast continent and the history of its race are the least known in the world.

The result of the studies of Dr. H. J. Spinden given out from Cambridge, Mass., on December 16, 1923, are helpful in shedding some light on the Mayan civilisation which existed in the Yucatan, Guatemala, and adjacent territory. The announcement now made that the old Mayan calendar dates back twenty centuries before

Columbus' discovery is a great step in the knowledge of these ancient races.

I cannot do better than record the official statement of Dr. H. J. Spinden of the Peabody Museum of Harvard University, which in part is as follows :

" These positive and perfectly defined points in chronology probably fell within the working years of one of the world's first scientists, the unknown mathematical and astronomical genius who invented the Central American Calendar and established the Mayan era.

" Actually the numerous dates on the monuments of the great Mayan civilisation in Yucatan and adjacent territory are counted from a beginning day, which corresponds to October 14, 3373 B.C. But this beginning day was reached by putting seven cycles of 144,000 days each for the past of the world before the historical first day of the numerical count. This historical first day was August 6, 613 B.C.

" On the second date (December 10, 580 B.C.) the perfected calendar of the Mayas was formally inaugurated, according to an inscription of the ruined Mayan city of Copan in Western Honduras. This perfected calendar functioned without the loss of a single day for 2,000 years, only to break down and pass out of use when Mayan books were destroyed by the Spanish Inquisition in Yucatan in A.D. 1561."

It seems to me, although this discovery is invaluable and a great step forward, yet it is only a link in a chain of data which when unravelled will come as a startling revelation to the world. Leading scientific experts in England have unhesitatingly declared that the Chucun-aque Indians, as disclosed by the photographs and other evidence, are of Mongol type. Accepting the theory that they migrated from the east via the Behring Stra

how can this account for the numerous other races that exist throughout this mysterious country—such as the Caribs and Xiaques of the Mosquitia, the Talamancas of Costa Rica, the Chiriqui of Agadulce, Panama—farther east, the San Blas, Chucunaque, Cuna Cuna, Cholkoi, the various Indian races in Colombia, the Jivaros and Tibolos of Ecuador, while in several places a type exists extremely low culturally and very like the African negro.

A glance at the photograph illustrating three preserved heads brings home a full realisation of the diversified types of skull, but all these Indian tribes differ characteristically, as will be noticed.

That the San Blas and Chucunaque have one common origin can, I think, be asserted without fear of contradiction, but within the space of less than 100 miles are the Cholkoi Indians, who are dissimilar in every way. How or where they originated is a mystery.

One has only to go back to history and read Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico* to realise the civilisation of the Aztecs was high in many ways, though it is possible that on the advent of the Spaniards degeneracy had already commenced to undermine this race.

There are great teocallis, a living testimony to-day, as are the Mayan monoliths, of a considerable scientific knowledge which existed among these people.

A few thousand miles east in Peru were the Incas. Here again is a testimony of a civilisation embodying high arts, many of which are lost to us at the present day.

Mr. Giffen Culbertson of Texas has recently thrown light on some almost unknown Indian tribes deep within the interior of Brazil. He found that although they apparently obeyed rigid laws in regard to morality—even going to the extreme of killing anyone who showed the least disrespect to a woman, yet they were in many ways as primitive and culturally low as they could possibly be, and at times even practised cannibalism.

His conclusions were that they ante-dated the ancient civilisation of the Andean and Aztec, expressing his belief that they existed before and were never conquered by the pre-Incas Indians who built the monoliths and Tia-Huanaca.

Another interesting tribe he discovered was the Amabaucas, and he heard rumours everywhere of a white tribe. I recently read the same report of the discovery of a white race in Panama, but think these various stories will be found on investigation to owe their foundation to the fact that a large percentage of albinos occur among the Indians in these countries.

As was to be expected, Mr. Culbertson again found the ancient tradition of a flood among these primitive people. It is strange how persistent this legend is throughout Central and South America.

Of the Maya, Aztecs, and Incas we have a certain amount of definite data, but what do we know of the origin and history of other tribes who remain obscure to this day in their impenetrable jungle and fastnesses?

Faced with this problem, I realise it is useless for me to attempt to grapple with a subject of such immensity.

For many years the legendary Atlantis has been the centre of controversy. But consider the Pacific. It is obvious that Easter Island, with its huge stone statues, was at one time part of a mainland, as must have been the Galapagos Islands—the home of the gigantic land tortoise. Certainly they could not have originated in a small fragment of land standing isolated hundreds of miles from the mainland and surrounded by the ocean.

Theories are useless. It will only be by close and persistent study through the years to come that light will be thrown on this fascinating subject. Is it not possible that a mighty empire existed, probably far greater than our own, covering millions of square miles of territory which are now deep beneath the ocean—that some remnants of a stupendous annihilation survived,

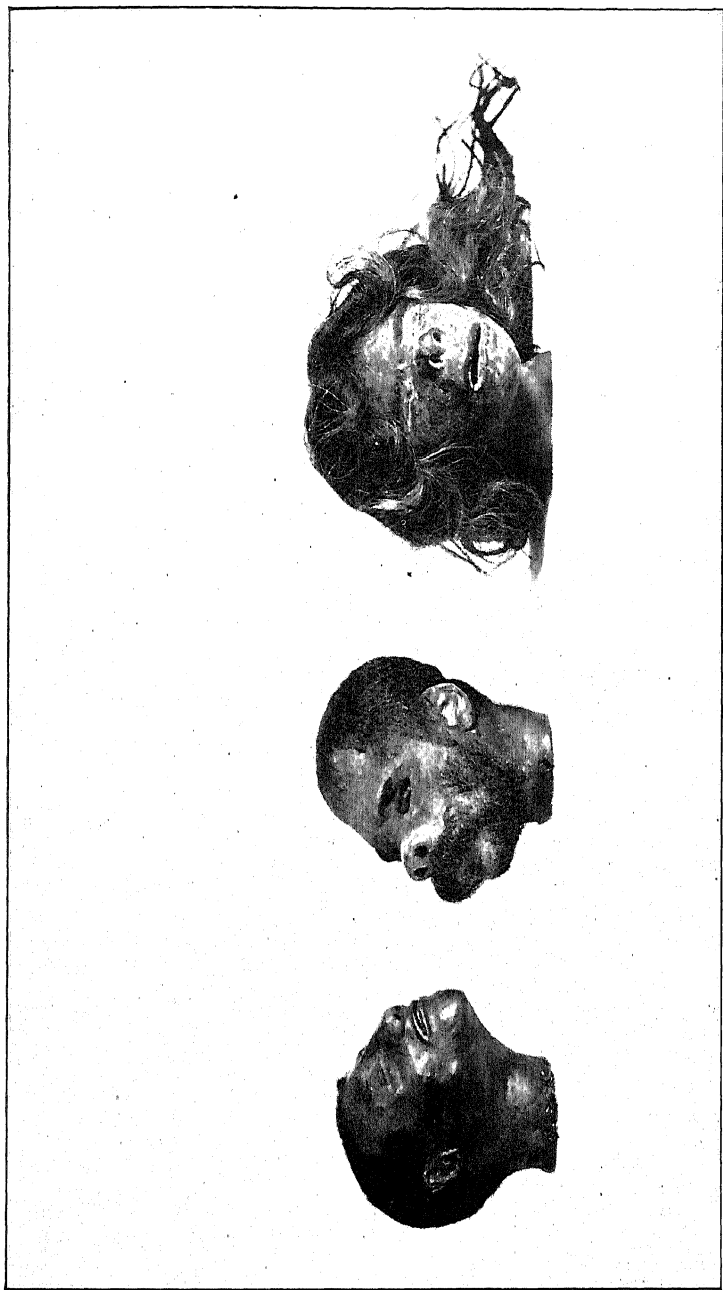
and that these primitive tribes to-day are the descendants, sinking ever downwards by a process of devolution, from their once high estate ?

Certain it is that a legendary knowledge of a high scientific order in one or two specialised crafts handed down by word of mouth remains, in contradistinction to their present low mentality.

Their sculpture, weaving, and skill in extracting dyes from trees, nuts, and plants must be hereditary, while they are adepts in abstruse poisons. I have related how the Chucunague dip the points of their arrows and darts in rotted livers impregnated with snake venom, but certain other tribes use a deadly alkaloid poison known as curari, the particular ingredient of which is derived from a tree.

I have heard of another obscure and extremely virulent poison which apparently is extracted from a specific portion of a fish. It seems to me beyond the range of possibility that races which are so ignorant that they do not possess the first rudimentary knowledge of how to feed themselves could think these things out.

I have only placed on record my thoughts and observations, yet am hopeful that an idea may spring from these records and be taken up by others with a scientific erudition greater by far than any I shall ever attain. If such should by chance materialise, then am I more than repaid for my temerity in venturing to touch on so mighty a subject.



REDUCED HUMAN HEADS, SHOWING DIVERSIFIED TYPES OF SKULL (pp. 143 and 260).

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